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ABSTRACT

The objectives, curriculum, and role of higher education and key policy and practice issues were reassessed against the backdrop of recent and predicted demographic, economic, and political changes and trends in Great Britain. Special consideration was given to the fact that "mature" learners now constitute the majority of entrants into British higher education. A model was proposed that calls for supporting a learning society by combining the strengths of the following two traditions of British higher education: (1) the pastoral/tutorial models of Oxford, Cambridge, and the new universities of the 1960s; and (2) the vocational and community-based traditions of civic universities and polytechnics. Also developed was an agenda of actions to create a culture where learning is recognized as a universal lifelong activity, empowerment of individuals is seen as key to economic and social development, accreditation seeks to include rather than exclude, higher education is an active contributor to economic activity, diversity is recognized as strength, and the outcomes and achievements of higher education are made explicit. The action agenda contained specific actions regarding the following areas of policy/practice: learner support, curriculum, credit, quality, and resources. Appended is a list of policy group members. (Contains 52 references.) (MN)

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An Adult Higher Education

A Vision

A Policy Discussion Paper

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THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR ADULT LEARNING

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An Adult Higher Education

A Vision

A Policy Discussion Paper
November 1993

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THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION
FOR ADULT LEARNING

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Preface: a new mainstream

In the three years since NIACE published its discussion paper "Adults in Higher Education" much has changed, both for higher education and for adult learners. For the first time in Britain, the majority of students are "mature". at entry, and the arguments for expanding adult participation are no longer the exclusive preserve of missionary minorities. There is now more widespread agreement that a great human resource is wasted by excluding people who could benefit from higher education, that the typical adult student can represent as good a return on public investment as a young person, and that it is inequitable to exclude people purely on grounds of age. Above all, the expansion of adult participation since 1970, and especially in the 1980s, has demonstrated the scale of the demand for an adult higher education.

In the past "adults" were seen as marginal to higher education, and the debate was about special arrangements to allow particular groups to undertake something like mainstream higher education. We believe that this has now changed, fundamentally and permanently, and that the central trends in higher education and in its social and economic context call for a redefinition of the mainstream itself. The system of the future will have adults at its centre, and while we do not propose that adult learners are entirely different from those who are completing their initial education, we do believe that higher education has much to learn from the experience of adult educators (including those working in continuing professional education).

The paper has its roots in the work of three bodies. The first is the Advisory Council for Adult Continuing Education (ACACE), and particularly its seminal report "Continuing Education: from policies to practice", the second is the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education (UDACE), which carried forward much of the ACACE agenda, and explored particularly issues of guidance, access and learning outcomes in higher education. The third is NIACE itself, with its ongoing commitment to lifelong learning for all, and concern to extend access to opportunities and the outcomes of learning to those who have benefitted least in the past.

The 1989 NIACE paper looked at the short term agenda. We now look further ahead, to try to identify what trends to encourage, and what issues need long term attention if we are to have the kind of higher education system needed for the 21st century. We believe that a vision of the longer term can help us all to identify common aims, and to debate issues where difference is real rather than imaginary. We are unlikely to get the future we want unless we can agree about what it might look like.

Stephen McNair
Associate Director (Higher Education)

Who is the paper for?

This paper is for policymakers, but in a learning society, policymaking should be a collective activity, in which many interests play a part. It is therefore addressed to a wide audience, including those concerned with:

policy in HE	who need a clear sense of where we are going, and how to steer policy
management of HE	who need to consider what kinds of organisations, structures and processes are needed
teaching in HE	who need to understand the new roles for both teachers and learners
learning	all of us, who need to understand how the world is changing, and what opportunities might be available in the future
employment	who need to understand how higher education can support the development of their organisations, and how change is affecting the people they recruit.

Action

We hope that readers will:

- reflect on the ideas raised and test them against their own experience and expectations
- act on the proposals which apply to them, and support action on others
- offer suggestions on the way forward

Any account of a system as diverse and complex as British higher education must be incomplete, and will reflect the particular experience and views of its authors. We recognise that there will be areas where we have misjudged the progress which has been made, or the direction which should be pursued. We hope that readers will tell us about these. The paper seeks to stimulate debate and development, not to close it.

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Executive Summary

This paper aims to stimulate debate about the role of higher education in Britain in the next twenty years. NIACE believes that the trends which have made mature learners the majority of new entrants to higher education will, and should, continue, and that this calls for a review of what we think higher education is, and how it operates. The paper offers a vision of a new kind of higher education - an "adult higher education" to meet the needs of Britain in the early decades of the next century. We hope that the paper will help all those concerned to identify which of the short term problems are most important and urgent, and what long term development issues need to be addressed.

The challenge

For most of the post war period higher education formed the pinnacle of the British education and training system. It recruited highly selectively from 18 year old school leavers (mainly male), and prepared them for secure and well paid employment in influential roles in society and the economy. Through its influence on school examinations, and its position as the end of the ladder of progression, it set standards for the rest of the education system. Through its teaching and research functions it defined what kinds of knowledge, skill and understanding were to be most highly valued in society.

All these have changed. The majority of entrants are now "mature" at the point of entry (even if one excludes the very large number who participate in continuing education), more than a quarter of school leavers now enter higher education, and the proportion of women of all ages has increased rapidly. A degree is no longer a guarantee of high status employment. Standards for the school system and vocational training are set by other agencies, and the role of the professional bodies is in debate. The traditional role of universities in defining and valuing knowledge is also less clear: in many fields new knowledge is created in commercial and industrial settings, and the right of academic world to validate knowledge has come under challenge, politically from external forces and philosophically from within the academic world itself.

Knowledge and the global community

Among the many pressures changing the nature of our society, two trends are central. The first is the accelerating speed with which new ideas and knowledge move from conception to application, and then become obsolete. This creates particular pressures on higher education, which is where much knowledge has traditionally been created, subjected to critical examination and transmitted. As a result higher education will have to process knowledge faster, and disseminate it to more people, more often.

The second trend is the globalising of communication, and with it the redefinition of cultural and social groups. On one hand this makes us all members of much larger communities, but on the other it leads us to reassert more comprehensible

and local identities, in terms of locality, nation, region or ethnic group. This too creates issues for higher education, which has always played a key role in promoting the understanding, development, examination and transmission of culture and values.

One of the effects of these changes is a global pressure to replace systems of central planning and control with devolved and fragmented market led structures, which allow a more rapid and individualised response to changing needs. These pressures make individuals more vulnerable to change, and challenge traditional notions of authority, accountability and democracy.

A changing world

Among the many ways in which Britain is changing, the following have a particular bearing on what we expect of our higher education system:

ageing population

Life expectancy is extending while birthrates remain low

changing structures of employment

More work is part-time, casual or freelance, and more workers are women. Manufacturing employment has declined, while knowledge and information based service industries have expanded.

higher skills

Much employment is becoming increasingly highly skilled, and dependent on rapidly changing knowledge and technologies, generating a growing need for continuous updating.

changing knowledge

Structures and fields of knowledge are changing. This involves the expansion of traditional areas, the creation of new fields, and the challenging of traditional boundaries and authorities.

changing communities

Most people are becoming involved in larger European and global economic and social structures whose rules and requirements are set far away. Perhaps in reaction to this, there is a counterbalancing pressure to assert local identities, within nations, regions, social and religious groups.

changing role of the State

The role of the state is shifting from the delivery of services like education to the provision of frameworks and regulation within which a market in such services can develop.

A changing higher education

At the same time higher education is changing:

from provider to market

Where the owners of knowledge (academics, professions and government) once decided what individuals and employers could or should have, institutions now compete increasingly to recruit "customers", to whom they must respond or die

different learners

The most rapidly growing groups of students in the 1980s were mature, and women of all ages. Unlike traditional students, the mature entrants were mainly learning while in employment.

more learners

Student numbers grew dramatically at all levels and in all categories during the 1980s, without proportionate expansion of resources.

different learning

Expansion was particularly rapid in part-time postgraduate programmes, full and part-time degrees, and in professional updating.

flexibility

Higher education began to offer learning in new modes, in smaller stages and open and flexible forms, and in new locations, including workplaces and community settings. It began to offer credit for smaller units of learning, and allow that credit to be accumulated and transferred between institutions.

partnership

Higher education began to be offered in new kinds of partnership, with other educational institutions and with employers and professional bodies.

The issues

These changes force us to reconsider what higher education is, and the roles which it can play, and raise a number of key issues for policy and practice. These include:

- what does "higher education" mean, and where are its boundaries?
- what will the new learners need?
- how large should the system be?
- who will have access to it?
- what will they have access to?
- who will pay for what?
- to whom will the system be accountable?
- what forms of institution will there be?
- how can continuous change be managed?

A vision

To respond to these challenges we believe that Britain will need more higher education, but that it will be very different from the system which we have known for most of the mid 20th century.

The model which we propose will seek to support a learning society, where all are effective lifelong learners, and supporters of other peoples' learning. It will do so by combining the strengths of two distinct traditions of British higher education: the pastoral/tutorial models of Oxbridge and the 1960s' new Universities, with the vocational and community based traditions of the Civic Universities and the Polytechnics.

Principles

Such a system will be:

a kind of education

defined not by its role in social selection, but by the ways in which it combines the creation and transmission of knowledge. It will be offered in many forms and locations, by a variety of agencies

lifelong

with the large majority of its learners engaged in recurrent learning throughout their lives, much of it in the workplace and community

student centred

organised to enable individuals to construct individual learning careers which reflect their personal ambitions, talents and changing circumstances while remaining intellectually coherent and challenging

achievement led

recognising and accrediting a wide range of achievement, rather than seeking to maintain "standards" by exclusion

proactive

seeking to feed ideas, knowledge and skills into society and the economy, through both teaching and research, rather than waiting for demand to be articulated

explicit

making its purposes, criteria and outcomes clear and public, to enable potential learners to make wise choices, and to make the shape and operation of the system open to debate. It will have clear public statements of what individuals are entitled to in terms of access, equity, quality, guidance, curriculum and public financial support

diverse

in its purposes, forms, institutions, learners and programmes

Frameworks

This system will be underpinned by three frameworks:

Learner Support

A coherent framework of services to assist individuals to plan and manage their lifelong learning careers, and to ensure the best possible match between needs, ambitions and learning. This will include:

- a framework of entitlements
- guidance at entry, during and exit from learning programmes
- systems for recording achievement
- processes for negotiating learning contracts
- tutorial support
- guarantees of equitable treatment

Such services will be delivered by higher education institutions both independently and in partnership with other agencies

Curriculum

A framework of learning opportunities aimed at the creation and development of lifelong learners which will offer:

- an agreed core curriculum
- a guaranteed range of opportunity in every region

- access to specialist knowledge and skills
- mechanisms for negotiation of learning programmes
- attention to issues which underpin a plural, tolerant, learning society
- opportunities in a range of modes, including part-time, open and distance learning and resource based.
- teaching and learning strategies designed to develop processes of reflection and critical thinking, and to involve learners actively in the negotiation, control and management of their own learning
- teaching approaches which build on the practical experience of learners, as well as established bodies of knowledge and current research.

Credit

A coherent national credit framework for post school education and training to provide the underpinning for all qualifications, whether work based or academic, at all levels from basic education to postgraduate learning. This will:

- enable individuals to acquire, accumulate and transfer credit between institutions and programmes
- recognise a broad range of achievement, in small stages
- be based on explicit statements of learning outcomes
- build coherence around individually negotiated agreements
- use a variety of assessment approaches
- make assessment accessible
- provide open entry to higher education at multiple levels

The system would require changes to quality assurance and resourcing systems.

Quality

Quality assurance systems will reflect the multiple accountability of higher education. They will:

- be based on explicit criteria and standards
- be open to public scrutiny and debate
- focus especially on the outcomes of higher education, and the value which it adds to individuals and the economy
- incorporate staff development to improve the quality of provision, and to ensure that all staff are actively involved in its development.

Resourcing

Funding systems will recognise the benefits of higher education both to the individual and the community. Government and employers will recognise that, in a knowledge and skill based economy, continuing learning is an investment (comparable to investment in plant), rather than an expenditure. This will be recognised in conventions of accounting, and the taxation system. Public funding will be designed to:

- guarantee a basic entitlement to all those able to benefit
- support the additional costs of guaranteeing equity of access
- stimulate individual and employer investment
- support work in specific areas of national priority
- ensure institutional diversity and quality
- ensure the maintenance of work in specialist and developing fields
- ensure reasonable institutional stability
- provide maintenance support for those who cease earning in order to take up study

Institutions will have coherent strategies for the development of their human resources (including academic and support staff) and for their capital resources.

1 A View of the Future

Higher education is both a part of society and a shaper of it. It is a major location for the creation, criticism and transmission of knowledge and ideas. In the past it prepared people for work and for membership of a range of social and professional communities. It helped to shape and criticise the values of those communities, and supports the economy on which they depend. It has recruited white, middle class young people, particularly young men; and prepared them for high status roles, providing a guarantee of secure and well paid employment. It set the standards for the school qualification system, and trained its teachers, and through this influenced what kinds of learning were promoted and valued at all levels of society. All these elements are changing, and higher education itself is changing as a result.

This chapter sketches some of the ways in which the context of higher education is changing. We offer a positive vision: of what we would hope to see, rather than what we fear, and we take an optimistic view of current trends. However, achieving the vision will call for concerted effort, and especially for intervention to ensure that all members of society benefit from change. We recognise that there is a much bleaker alternative, a scenario where a better life for a majority is built on and constrained by the exclusion of a large disenfranchised minority. We believe that this would be neither morally defensible, nor politically wise.

1.1 Population

How will people manage their lives in a world where everyone can expect more than 50 years of active life after leaving initial education?

The population is ageing. Birth rates have fallen substantially since the 1960s, and life expectancy has increased steadily throughout this century. By 2011 the century half the British population will be 50 or over (CSO 1993), and most people will be able to expect more than 50 years of active healthy life after completing initial education in their early twenties. At the same time the European workforce (as presently defined) will be declining by 300,000 a year. In response to this it is possible that real retirement ages will rise, and older people will take on new roles, in either paid work or in voluntary work and leisure, for which they may need to develop new skills and knowledge.

Social structures are changing too. The 1970s and 1980s have seen the dismantling of many of the large industries and public sector employers which employed the bulk of working class men. The result has been major disruption of the communities which depended on them, and a challenge to the collective traditions, value systems and cultures which they supported. For some people this has meant increased mobility, and a move into a new, more individualistic and entrepreneurial world, which has brought them many benefits. For others, the result has been long term unemployment, and "social exclusion", with a loss of identity and purpose for individuals and whole communities.

1.2 Work

How will we ensure that all the talents of the population are used to the full as the structures of work change?

It is widely agreed that Britain needs a more highly skilled and adaptable population, capable of responding rapidly to changing circumstances. This has been the driving force of change in the qualifications system and of major national initiatives like the National Education and Training Targets, and Investors in People. The speed of technological change and the need to create a highly skilled, knowledge based economy, will call both for rapid and frequent updating, and for more people to be involved in innovation and the generation of new knowledge and skills.

However, skill shortages remain in 1993, at the end of a protracted recession, and in a period of high unemployment, and concern continues that many people lack the underpinning knowledge and understanding which can enable individuals and companies to respond rapidly to change. despite this, there is evidence of serious underuse by employers of the skills already available within the workforce. There is also evidence that, faced with skill shortage and low skilled labour British employers adapt by shifting to products with low skill requirements, rather than by training, and the National Institute Economic Review in May 1991 suggested that British employers pay significantly less for higher qualifications than those in other developed countries and the real rate of financial return for improving qualifications is, in many cases, very small. As change overtakes traditional industries, making skills obsolete, and exporting less skilled work to countries with lower labour costs, it becomes increasingly important to ensure that the labour market is driven by supply of new skills and ideas, and not merely led by demand to fill gaps in the old workforce.

The shape and nature of the workforce is changing. Only 1 in 4 employed men, and 1 in 8 women now work in manufacturing, and much manufacturing work has moved to countries with substantially lower labour costs, and is unlikely to return. What manufacturing remains is increasingly either highly capital intensive, creating little employment, or low skilled. Part-time work has expanded, especially among men, at the expense of full time. The numbers of women in work have risen rapidly, and for most women, paid employment is now normal through much of their adult life. However, they are more often part time and typically less well paid and secure than men. Self employment also grew rapidly during the 1980s, to form 12% of the workforce, and self employed people were a more highly qualified. (ED 1993)

There has been a marked trend towards "core and periphery" models of employment, with organisations maintaining a small core of secure employees and a growing body of other workers employed "flexibly" on a contract or casual basis (Wareing 1992). Many of these peripheral workers will be freelance professionals with highly specialised skills, who will need to acquire, maintain and create new skills throughout their working lives. For some of these this world offers a rich and rewarding lifelong career as they move, with changing interests, experience

and commitments, between full and part time, specialist, technical and managerial, freelance and organisation based work. However, it does not follow that this will be the experience of the majority of peripheral workers, especially those with few skills to sell, for many of whom freedom may mean insecurity. Current trends may also strengthen the divisions between the highly educated and paid groups, the less skilled peripheral workers and a significant minority who remain permanently outside, employed, if at all, intermittently on a part-time and casual basis, with long periods of unemployment and very little real or perceived stake in the economy or the life of the community.

1.3 Knowledge

How will we develop a knowledge based economy, without making access to knowledge a source of greater social, educational and economic division?

Recent decades have seen the development of whole new fields of knowledge. Some, like information technology or biotechnology, arise from technological change; others, like womens' studies, are the result of changing attitudes and social conditions, and the evolution of academic debates, while a third group, like environmental studies, stem from a combination of both with cross fertilisation between established disciplines. Higher education has a key role to play in the identification and development of such new fields, creating and testing not only new technologies and their application, but new ways of thinking and understanding.

Knowledge will also become more fluid and active. Traditional school based models of education have implied that the structures of knowledge, its boundaries and forms are given, and that a primary purpose of higher education is to transmit these. While such notions have always been challenged, and one of the central purposes of higher education has always been to expose them to criticism, the process of challenge, from culturally, socially or economically excluded groups, and from lay people, will accelerate, and the right of particular groups to define what is legitimate knowledge will increasingly be tested from a growing range of standpoints. The definition of what knowledge is valuable will lie more in its application than its traditional status, bringing the places of higher education closer to the world around. In some areas of professional education this relationship is already a dynamic one, where the continuing education of the profession is a way of developing its own knowledge base, and reflection on current practice is a central educational tool. Such approaches are likely to become increasingly common in other fields.

The economy will be increasingly based on knowledge and information. A growing proportion of gross domestic product is generated through the production and development of knowledge in all its forms, and Britain has traditionally been a major producer and exporter of knowledge and skills. The key growth area for employment is likely to be the "knowledge worker", who will be highly educated, mobile and adaptable, with strong problem solving and decision making skills (Rajan 1993). Higher education is one of the principal sources of new knowledge, and one of the routes through which it is developed and disseminated. Although

much new knowledge will be created in the private sector, higher education institutions will be closely involved, as consultants, trainers and advisers, and will provide a major channel through which such knowledge is brought into the mainstream curriculum as it moves into the public domain.

Information technologies are already affecting how and where people learn, and changes in technology will make an increasing impact on ways of developing and disseminating knowledge, and on ways of thinking and managing information. As access to information becomes easier, the relative value of the skills of managing information will rise, and the need to retain volumes of formal knowledge will decline. At the same time these technologies will raise complex problems about the ownership and selling of knowledge: about intellectual property and pricing, and about the ownership of the media through which knowledge is transmitted. We may develop a society where everyone has access to vastly greater quantities of information, but the organisation of the new media may result in a society divided into the information rich and information poor.

1.4 Community

How do we ensure that social and cultural diversity are sources of creativity rather than conflict?

Britain, like most developed countries, embraces a wide variety of cultures and value systems, including those based on history, location, language, class, ethnicity, gender, and disability. The tension between collective values and those of sub-groups will continue to be a cause of social and political stress, as well as a source of innovation and creativity. There will continue to be a premium on promoting understanding and tolerance, and on the development of political processes which prevent diversity leading to conflict.

Social, and especially technological, change makes it easier for individuals to communicate, but it also makes it easier for individuals and groups to intrude into, each others' lives. The potential, both for active participation and for conflict are both increasing sharply, and the pressures for the State itself to use these technologies for authoritarian purposes may be strong, especially in the light of public perceptions of threats to civil order, intercommunal conflict and challenges to established value systems. Global political pressures will bear increasingly heavily on individual countries and their citizens. The mobility of population and work, the ease of international communication, and the global impact of industrial change on the environment will all strengthen constraints on action by individual countries. Environmental issues in particular are likely to be a much more significant political force.

In this context it will be important to use the opportunities provided by wider access to knowledge and experience to develop more accessible and participative democratic processes, which give individuals access to better understanding of issues and constraints.

Developing global markets, and improvements in physical and electronic communication will make individuals, or at least their skills, increasingly mobile. Many people will spend significant parts of their lives working or living in more than one country, and far more will have day to day dealings with people in or from other countries. As Britain becomes a multicultural province of a multicultural Europe, its citizens will need much closer understanding of cultural and social differences, as well as improved language skills.

The globalising of the economy is likely to be counterbalanced by increasing regionalism. As the pressures which held large nation states together in the immediate post war years relax, many individuals' sense of identity will be tied increasingly to regional and cultural grouping. In a new Europe, to be Welsh or Catalan may be more important than to be British or Spanish. For some people to be Muslim or black may transcend boundaries of region and nation. Education will have a role to play both in supporting these identities and in helping people to transcend them.

Large organisations only thrive where there are overwhelming economies of scale. One implication of global markets is stronger competition, with requirements for faster and more flexible response to changing demand. We are likely to see a continuing development of smaller responsive organisations, or of federal and devolved structures within large frameworks. This will have profound implications for skills like communication, teamwork and self management which individuals will need to survive as workers or managers or new kinds of organisation.

1.5 The role of the State

What will be the role of the State in a more culturally diverse, mobile society, and a knowledge based economy?

Recent decades have seen a reduction in peoples' expectations of the State. In the 1980s, in Britain and elsewhere, governments argued that the limits to the willingness of individuals to contribute, through taxation, to public services have been reached, and that the state either cannot, or should not, intervene in many social and individual issues in the way which was planned in the aftermath of the second world war.

In practice, however, an apparent withdrawal by the State is often accompanied by new forms of regulation and intervention which actually increase control. One of the main trends in this reshaping is the shift from the State as provider of services to the State as purchaser, or regulator of them. This has happened in education, where the formal power to intervene has not been reduced, but where it is argued that individuals and employers should play a greater part in making choices, and contributing financially to the costs.

In relation to higher education, these trends would seem imply no major expansion of public funding for higher education in particular: priorities are felt to be elsewhere, and it has been argued that the primary benefits are individual rather than public.

2 A Changing Higher Education

The changing world challenges our notions of what higher education is, and who its learners will be, but the system has already changed in many ways. This chapter outlines some of these.

2.1 The move to the market

For most of the post war period, what was offered by the higher education system was determined mainly by academic specialists, within a broad framework set by Government through funding mechanisms. The last decade has seen a shift towards a more market led model, allowing the forces of demand and supply to play a larger part. We have seen the rise of the notion of the "customer" (individual, employer or State) for higher education, and an increasing concern with the application of knowledge rather than its transmission. These changes are reflected in the growth of adult participation; in the closer links between higher education and the workplace; and in a stronger role for higher education in the continuing development of the professions. This has changed the relative status of institutions, departments, subjects and activities, and weakened the autonomy of the individual academic. Government remains a powerful force, especially through its major stake in funding, but has reduced its monopoly power to control the size and shape of the system as private funding has increased. At institutional level, the need to manage this new market model has also led to shifts of power and control, with the centralisation of some activities previously devolved to departments, and the devolution of others.

2.2 New learners

Since the 1940s, learners in higher education have been a relatively homogenous group (although this was not always so). Most entered the higher education system immediately after leaving school, in order to read for first degrees, and higher education was the completion of a continuous process of education and socialisation from the age of 5 to 21. They studied full time, away from home, over three years. Their fees were paid, and they received grant support (and, recently, subsidised loans) from public funds.

These "beginners" largely formed our notion of what higher education is, but while they still form a majority in most of the "old" universities, and their numbers increased by nearly 30% between 1980 and 1990, they are now a minority of students in the University system as a whole.

The bulk of expansion in recent years has come from other groups, especially women and older learners (DFE 1992). However, this is not a homogenous group of "adult" or "mature" learners, and they present higher education with a wide range of needs and experience. They are of all ages over 21. They may seek knowledge, new or improved employment, stimulating social interaction, an intellectual or personal challenge. While some are subject to strong domestic or

financial pressures, others are generously supported by employers, and some by their own financial resources. To illustrate the diversity we describe below four broad, and overlapping categories. All four have expanded more rapidly than the "beginners" in recent years, although statistics do not make it easy to identify them separately.

deferred beginners

for a variety of reasons, including previous career misjudgments, family circumstances or the effects of past discrimination, entering the system later than is traditional. These represent a quarter of all "mature" entrants, and are in general in their 20s. They usually study full time, and are funded from public sources.

returners

are making changes in their career or life direction after a experience of paid work or domestic responsibility. Returners often seek in higher education a new direction, through opening a new career route, or reviving neglected or outdated skills. Returners formed one of the major growth areas of higher education in the 1980s. People in this category are typically in their 30s, and the majority are women (the major growth group in the workforce). Returners often study full time, and are substantially funded from public sources, although they usually incur personal costs from loss of earnings and the need to pay for childcare and domestic expenses, on top of the costs like transport, books and equipment which fall on all students.

developers

are using higher education to enrich and extend their knowledge, skills and understanding within a chosen career pattern. This includes development and updating for a growing number of professions, and the shift which many people make from technical to managerial roles in mid life. The bulk of such learners are over 30 and under 50. Their learning is more likely to be funded from private sources, including employers and learners themselves.

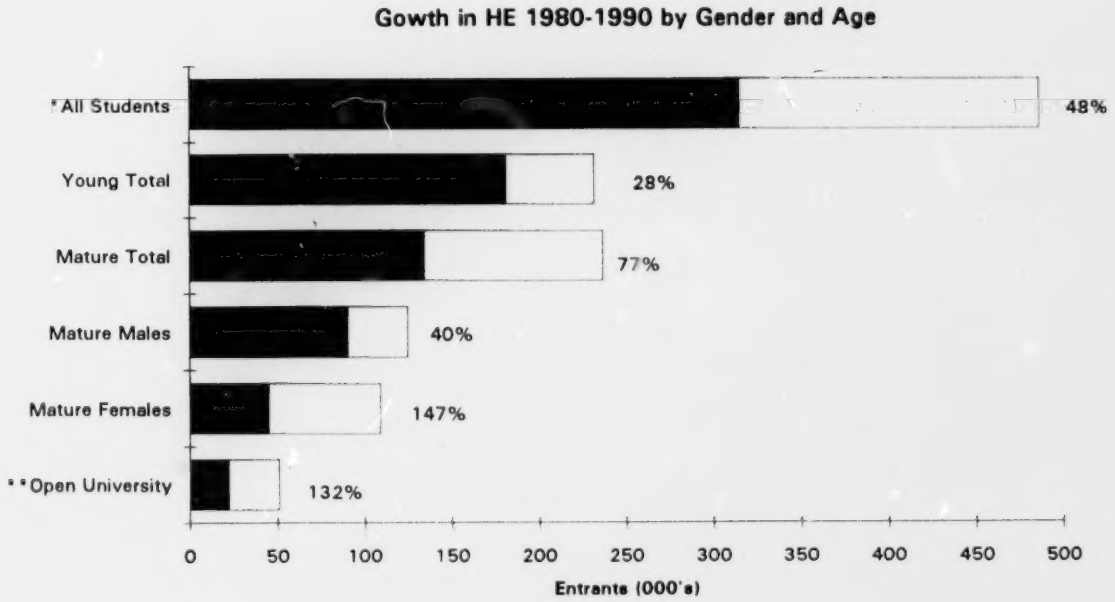
enrichers

are adding new strands to their education or career development outside the frame of immediate employment. These may include education for voluntary or community roles or the exploration of new fields of knowledge as part of preparation for, or education in, retirement. For some the driving force is a simple thirst for knowledge, or an attempt to come to terms with individual identity in a changing world. A high proportion of these learners study at their own expense. Although the motivation may often seem "non-vocational", a sizeable proportion of those who embark on such learning do, in time, relate it to work (paid or unpaid).

These four categories are not sharply distinct. Many higher education courses recruit mature learners from all of them, and all groups can be found studying at all levels of further and higher education. Nor should they be seen as of differing degrees of priority. A healthy society and economy, and a serious higher education system, needs to address the needs of all four.

2.3 Expansion

The dramatic scale and nature of expansion in higher education during the 1980s is shown in the charts. Most of the trends which they indicate were strengthening at the end of the decade, although the government's constraints on funding in 1993 may have checked this. Growth was three times as rapid for mature students generally as for young people, and most rapid among mature women. During the decade the proportion of the 21-44 year old population in higher education increased by 57% (from 7.9 to 12.4 per thousand). Mature student numbers more than doubled on part-time postgraduate programmes, and on first degree programmes, both full and part-time. There was rapid expansion of continuing education, particularly in Business and Management, and in professional programmes. Here total numbers rose by 54% to 574,000, and Open University Associate Student enrolments rose fourfold to 31,000 (two thirds of them in professional and postgraduate programmes).

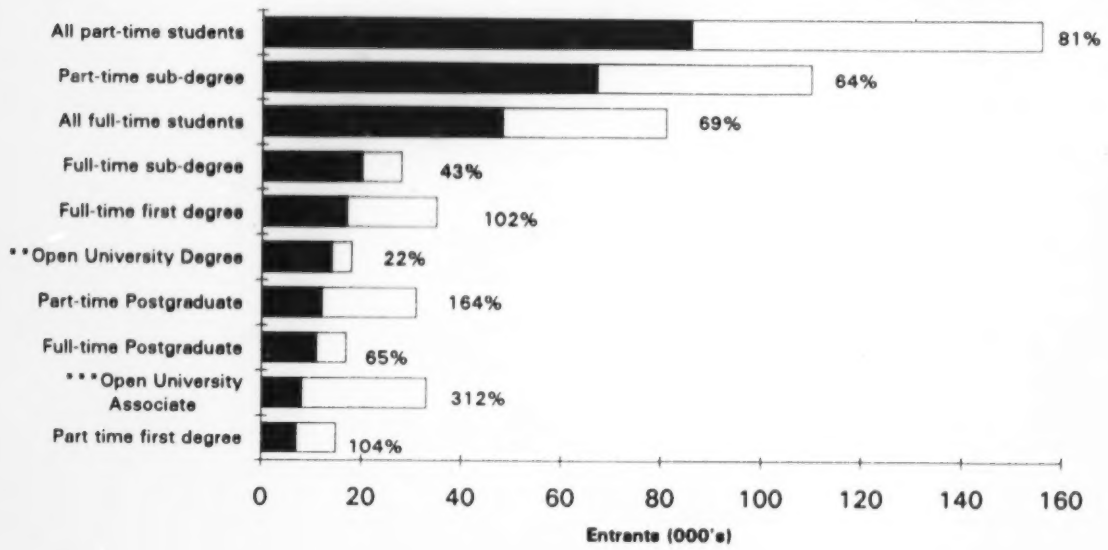


* Excludes Continuing Education

** Includes all degree and Associate Student registrations

(Source: DES Statistical Bulletin 18/92 and Open University Pocket Guide 1993)

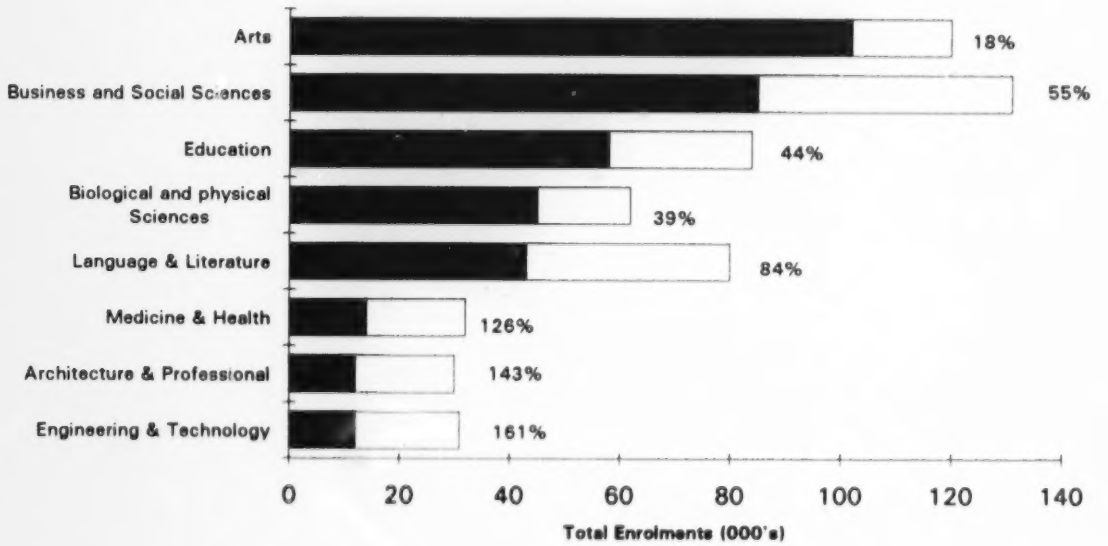
Mature Students* - Growth in HE 1980-90 by Mode and Level



* Full- and part-time Home Students excluding Continuing Education
** Open University Registrations 1981-91
*** Includes advance Professional and Postgraduate registrations

(Source: DES Statistical Bulletin 18/92 and Open University Pocket Guide to Open University figures 1993)

Continuing Education Growth 1982-89 by Subject



(Source: DES Statistical Bulletin 8/92)

If these levels of adult participation were to be sustained, and the participation rate of young people remains above 25%, one might reasonably expect that, within 20 years, more than a quarter of all people between 20 and 60 will have had direct experience of higher education, and the figure could well reach 50%. This is a very different kind of higher education from the selective system of the 1970s.

2.4 Changing institutions

At the beginning of the 1990s a unified higher education system was created. The former polytechnics became Universities, with their own degree awarding powers, and the funding of the system was placed in the hands of the Higher Education Funding Councils, which also had responsibility for the assessment of quality. The Higher Education Quality Council was also created, accountable to the Universities themselves, to undertake quality audit. A growing number of central initiatives were set up by the Funding Councils to encourage development in the use of technology, teaching and learning and widening access. These added to a number of Employment Department programmes, notably Enterprise in Higher Education, which were promoting increased relevance to work.

Expansion was most rapid in the former polytechnics, and resulted in a number of structural changes. Institutions began to consider alternative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment under the pressure of numbers, and in many cases began to develop more centralised management structures.

2.5 Changing modes

Part-time study, especially at postgraduate level, has been the most rapidly expanding area of higher education in recent years, mainly in the "old" universities, where part-time students were previously a rarity outside extramural classes. The growth of part-time post experience work, and the slow beginnings of accreditation for prior learning, imply a more dynamic relationship in learners' lives between work and higher education.

Open learning has had a major impact on higher education, principally through the Open University, which remains the largest University in Britain, and the only one which provides exclusively for adult learners. It has been a force for innovation in higher education, influencing the whole system through its materials and the involvement of the staff of other institutions in its work.

Distance and open learning approaches have been spreading elsewhere in higher education, albeit less conspicuously. No other university has contemplated affording the very substantial infrastructure of materials and counselling support on which the Open University has been built, but the Open Learning Foundation, building on previous initiatives, is developing approaches which draw on the OU experience through collaboration between "mainstream" universities, embedding material and open learning approaches within existing curricula in order to respond to larger numbers and new kinds of student.

The development of modular course structures, and credit transfer and accumulation schemes have made it possible for individuals to pursue parts of existing degree programmes, and this has provided an economical means of professional updating for some, and a new access route for others.

2.6 New locations

Higher education has always taken place both within and beyond the walls of universities. Much professional education at postgraduate level is carried out through specialist institutions in other locations, while the extramural tradition has maintained a strong and evolving higher education presence in the wider community throughout the present century.

Increasingly, higher education also takes place in the workplace. In some fields only private organisations can resource equipment and staff, while in others, issues of commercial confidentiality require that work, which would be described as higher education in a university, is mounted in the workplace. Some, but by no means all, of this work is conducted in partnership with universities. In some cases teaching is provided by an employer with accreditation from a university, in others the university may provide teaching, while the profession or employer provides accreditation.

These patterns are likely to become more complex. More higher education is likely to take place outside the walls of universities, and universities are likely to move increasingly to supporting teaching, assessment and research outside their own walls.

2.7 New boundaries

When there was a direct match between age progression and academic progression, the distinction between "schooling" or "further education" on one hand, and "higher education" on the other, needed no defending or rationalising. As higher education comes to work with different learners, from different backgrounds, studying in different places and taught by different people, the question arises of what "higher" means, and who has the right to decide, especially when defining a course as higher or postgraduate brings with it more generous resourcing for institutions and learners, and higher status for teachers.

As a result of these changes, the notion that higher education is in any sense distinct from other kinds of post school education has itself been challenged. It has been proposed that higher and further education should be merged into a single tertiary sector, on two grounds. Firstly, it is claimed that the notion of level itself is inappropriate in a complex and multidimensional world of learning where individual learners may move "up" "down" and "sideways". Secondly it is argued that the division of institutions into "further", "higher", "adult" and "training" places unnecessary barriers in the way of learners, and results in inequitable distribution of resources to institutions and individuals. It is also pointed out that many countries do not draw any distinction between further and higher education.

3 The Challenge

The last two chapters outlined some of the changes taking place in higher education and its environment. This chapter identifies the issues which these changes raise for higher education and those who work in and with it.

3.1 What will the new learners need?

Adult learners come to higher education with substantial experience of independent adult life. This experience colours their attitudes, motivation and approaches to learning, and distinguished them from the traditional clientele of mainstream higher education. A new higher education will need to take account of this, although we recognise that many of the changes which would make higher education better for adults will also make it better for young people.

The issues include:

using experience

Mature learners are able to draw on a wide range and variety of experience to test academic perceptions and theories. This implies approaches to learning which stress relevance to personal experience and motives, and help individuals to integrate their learning with their personal conceptual frameworks rather than merely reproduce knowledge on paper.

responding to diversity

Mature learners participate for many reasons, and their motivation is often complex. Learners in the future are less likely to see higher education as simply a route to a specific career, and more likely to relate it to a complex of personal objectives, including direct preparation for paid, voluntary and domestic work

allowing recurrence

Learners seeking to participate intermittently throughout life, will seek more opportunities on a part-time basis, possibly in "unsocial hours" like weekends and evenings, and many will seek portable accreditation in smaller units, to enable them to accumulate qualification over a longer period

providing guidance

The new, more diverse, complex and flexible higher education system will offer more opportunity and choice. It will also provide more opportunity for confusion, mistaken choices and wasted effort. Better and more accessible guidance will be needed to enable individuals to relate the opportunities to their own needs and circumstances.

recognising constraints

Many learners combining study with work and domestic responsibilities will need more flexibility and consistency in timetabling and location, and have greater needs for support with travel, childcare etc

funding

Learners paying a higher proportion of the costs of learning themselves are likely to be more sensitive to the quality of what they receive, in teaching and other services, and more critical where this is inadequate.

confidence

Some adult returners have had previous experiences of education which weakened their confidence in their ability to learn. If confidence is to be rebuilt and sustained, higher education providers need to be sensitive to these issues, and provide appropriate support through transition into higher education. The evidence is that non-traditional learners do, in general, perform better academically than their younger counterparts, provided such support is available.

3.2 How large a system?

Demand for higher education expanded rapidly in the late 1980s. When the Government announced the restriction of expansion in 1992 growth was at a peak, and there was little evidence of reduction in demand, despite increasing financial pressure on learners. There is still substantial untapped potential among those who would meet current entry requirements, but were unable to participate in their youth, when the system was much smaller. There is also a growing market for continuing professional development, whose development is essential if the notion of a knowledge based economy is to be realised. It is possible that there will be some relative expansion of adult participation as institutions seek to make up for shortfalls in public funding by recruiting more self funding, or employer funded, adults.

However, Government priorities have shifted, at least temporarily, from the expansion of higher education to further education, in response to a concern about the relative shortage in Britain of technical and intermediate skills. This policy shift may be reinforced by perceptions of "graduate oversupply" based on traditional notions of what is a "graduate job" and emphasised by graduate unemployment in times of recession. The need for a knowledge and skills led economic recovery will need arguing forcefully if this resistance is to be overcome.

3.3 Who will have access?

It would be possible to expand the system by relaxing entry criteria for young people, achieving growth without changing the overall balance of participation

between different social or age groups. Consolidation of the system, in response to current constraints on public expenditure, may therefore have a disproportionate impact on adult learners. This is particularly the case in those institutions which choose to return to their traditional roles and clienteles, who may be perceived to be either less demanding, to be "what higher education is really for". There is a danger that traditional notions of higher education, linked with crude performance indicators, will encourage institutions to do this, competing with each other to recruit less well qualified young people, rather than recruit older learners, although the latter may achieve better results. Alternatively, there may be a reinforcement of the traditional pressures on adults to finance their own learning directly. This would make access more difficult for those on low incomes or unable to call on support from employers.

Adults, and especially those over 35, suffer in education, as in the labour market, from beliefs that investment in older people is uneconomic, because of their shorter prospective working life. This neglects the greater frequency with which young people move between employers, the greater speed with which older graduates (with greater life experience) become productive, and the growing potential for older people to make a contribution, through voluntary and domestic roles as well as paid employment, well into their 60s and 70s.

Women have benefited especially from the expansion of the last decade. Many attitudinal barriers to womens' participation have been undermined, if not broken down, and the primary area of expansion in the labour market has been among women. However, major practical difficulties, like the absence of childcare, problems of timetabling and transport remain, making participation considerably more of a challenge than for most men from similar backgrounds.

Participation by ethnic minorities varies greatly. Young people from some ethnic groups are overrepresented in relation to their proportion of the population as a whole, while in others the reverse is true. In general, ethnic minority adults are more likely than white adults to be participating in post-school education, to do so for more work related reasons, and to receive less financial support from public sources or their employers. A particular issue for first generation immigrants is the difficulty of negotiating transfer of overseas qualifications for entry to British higher education or for professional recognition.

3.4 Access to what?

The unification of the higher education system, with institutions developing particular missions, could lead to a rich diversity of opportunity. It could equally easily lead to the emergence of a "second class" of institutions, whose qualifications are, or are perceived to be, inferior. The characteristic devolved structures of higher education have made it easy for the imaginative and committed to innovate without challenging the prejudices of their colleagues elsewhere in the institution. In many areas this has led to real change, but the same devolution has made it possible for others to resist such change, with the result that non-traditional learners remain a minority even in some fields where recruitment is weak.

3.5 Who pays?

Higher education is expensive, whoever is paying, and both the balance of public and private funding, and the means by which they might be channelled, are live issues. The aim must be to find the best value for money from a combination of individual, employer and community resourcing.

Government has sought to reduce unit costs, and has begun to transfer the cost of student maintenance (which is a unique feature of the British higher education system) from the public to the private purse. The benchmark for funding models remains the minority of learners who are full time residential undergraduates, and relative discrimination against part-timers continues, despite the fact that they contribute a higher proportion of the cost of their own learning. The typical mature learner already makes a substantial investment in higher education, through income foregone, as well as the costs of supporting dependants, travel and materials, and the personal stresses involved in major changes in career and living patterns.

Key questions include whether all citizens should have some form of entitlement to public support, and if so how it should be expressed; whether a greater proportion of funding should be channelled through vouchers or "credits", using public resources to give individuals purchasing power in a new market; or through short or long term loans (and if so, recovered by what mechanism); and what contribution employers should make.

3.6 How is higher education accountable?

For most of the post war period higher education controlled its own quality through individual Universities and the Council for National Academic Awards, and determined its own priorities. Accountability was to an academic discipline based or professional community. In recent years more emphasis has been put on accountability to employers, and where accountability is within the academic community this has been increasingly to institutional, rather than subject based sources. The extent and means by which the system should be accountable to learners is not yet resolved. The development of student charters, the publication of performance indicators and league tables all contribute to making the system and institutions more publicly accountable, but also increase the risk that inappropriate indicators will cause unintended damage. It is vital that such systems reflect the nature and purposes of the new higher education, rather than those of the past, and are informed by appropriate monitoring systems.

3.7 What kind of institution?

In the unified higher education system created by the 1991 Further and Higher Education Act, institutions are encouraged to compete for students and status. It is not yet clear how institutions, departments and faculties will define their identities, and while it is possible that a much more diverse range of approaches will evolve to meet increasingly complex and diverse needs, there is a danger that

crude, single dimensional hierarchies will develop, reducing the ability of the system as a whole to meet the diverse needs of the future.

A further issue is the role of the university itself. Will the traditional combination of teaching, assessment, accreditation, research and consultancy of the "old" universities continue within single institutions, or will some or all of these functions transfer, for all or some work, to other agencies? Already much learning takes place outside Universities, and professional bodies accredit qualifications. What part does the university have to play in relation to learning outside its immediate control?

A critical question for institutions is the relationship between the central functions of teaching and research. In the absence of a strong tradition of high status institutions devoted (as in France) to teaching alone, there is a danger that a division of institutions into "teaching" and "research" will reinforce inappropriate hierarchies of status. As more learners are themselves current practitioners in the field, and as the research component of most work increases, so active research becomes a more central element of teaching and learning. The arguments for strengthening the teaching/research link may be supported by the needs of the new higher education, and the nature of its new learners.

3.8 How to manage continuous change?

The upheaval which higher education has experienced in the last few years must not be seen as a unique event. As change becomes a permanent condition of society, the system will need to respond constantly and rapidly to new needs and expectations, in what it teaches, how it teaches and how it organises itself and relates to the world around. This presents institutions with major new managerial tasks, which are particularly challenging for higher education institutions, with their traditions of participation in decision making and varying degrees of central control. They will need better ways of deploying and developing their human resources, and management strategies which retain the commitment of staff and the sense of academic community while responding to more frequent and volatile external pressures.

4 A Vision

Higher education is no longer a world to which few aspire and in which fewer succeed. Nor is participation, even in the most prestigious institutions, a guarantee of a rewarding life or well paid employment. As the roots of its traditional status in narrow selection at entry, and the economic and social roles taken on by graduates, are eroded, higher education will need to defend its identity and role more publicly, and on a more rational basis.

The vision we outline here offers such a definition. In some ways, it builds on two of the central traditions of British higher education - the pastoral/tutorial traditions of Oxbridge and the new universities of the 1960s, and the vocational and community based ones of the civic universities and the polytechnics. It proposes a higher education built around the individual learner, but more closely rooted in the life and activity of the community: both more "vocational" in the broad sense (recognising the changing nature of work itself), and more lifelong. It assumes that in the new circumstances of the early 21st century, higher education must involve far more people, and be more open, both in terms of access and accountability.

We do not argue for the abolition of the notion of "higher education". We believe that it has a distinct role to play in the development of individuals and of the knowledge base of society and the economy. However, we propose that its boundaries should be redefined, on the basis that what makes higher education distinct is the intimate link between the creation of knowledge and its transmission, both to individuals and wider communities. In this it is unlike further education or schools, whose primary purpose is to transmit established knowledge to individuals, and it implies that some of what is currently described as "adult education" and "further education" should be recognised as "higher", while parts of current "higher education" should not.

Principles

The higher education system which we propose will be based on six principles. It will be:

lifelong

learner centred

achievement led

proactive

explicit

diverse

Frameworks

It will be built around three major frameworks, for

learner support - helping individuals to manage their lifelong learning careers

curriculum - providing opportunities for learning

credit - measuring and recognising achievement

This will call for changes in culture and attitudes, quality and accountability and in resourcing. We now examine these issues in more detail.

4.1 Principles

Lifelong

Higher education will be primarily an adult activity, supporting individuals in their lifelong learning careers as they enter and reenter formal provision on a full-time or part-time basis, and closely linked to the processes of personal and professional development in employment, community and domestic roles. It will seek to ensure that all its learners are motivated to continue learning, independently and with others, throughout their lives.

Learner centred

It will be built around the needs and aspirations of individual learners, for two reasons. Firstly, because the most effective learning is usually achieved by individuals motivated by personal enthusiasm and curiosity, and by the desire to solve real problems. Secondly, in a world undergoing continuous and unpredictable change, the interests of society and the economy will be best served by encouraging everyone to develop and use all their talents to the full, rather than by attempting to plan for them.

Achievement led

Its aim will be to promote and extend achievement in the broadest sense, recognising that individuals have many and complex aims and that the welfare of the whole community is best served by developing the full potential of all. It will measure quality by what is achieved, in terms of the expansion of knowledge and the achievement of learners, wherever that takes place, not by how many people are excluded.

Proactive

It will serve the economy and society by playing a proactive role in the creation and dissemination of knowledge and ideas. It will integrate the

creation of knowledge ("research" in all its forms) with its transmission (teaching). This will reflect the need for closer links between the creation of knowledge, its application and transmission, and the fact that most learners in higher education will themselves be mature people, for whom learning will be taking place in close conjunction with work, rather than in isolation from it.

Explicit

It will offer clear and public descriptions of what it offers and its outcomes, both for individuals and the wider community. This will enable individuals to make informed decisions about learning routes, and the community to debate and make judgements about the performance of the system and of individual institutions.

There will be public statements of entitlement to post-school education, at national and institutional level, including entitlement to higher education. This will open to public scrutiny and debate questions of what is provided, and on what terms, including the extent and nature of support from public funds. Statements of entitlement will include a number of elements, including entitlement to:

- quality, including redress for grievances
- lifelong guidance, for learning and work
- a core curriculum
- a guaranteed range of services within any region
- credit for learning achieved, available in small cumulative steps
- a defined level of financial support from public funds

Since rights also imply responsibilities, statements of entitlement will include a statement of the commitments expected from learners, including attendance, time and resources.

Diverse

It will be diverse, in its purposes, learners, programmes and structures, in order to respond to a more complex and rapidly changing environment. This diversity will be maintained within a broad common framework of services, for guidance, curriculum and accreditation.

4.2 A Learner Support Framework

A learner centred higher education will require mechanisms to help individuals to manage their learning and working careers, and to ensure the best possible match between needs, ambitions and learning. The framework will:

provide guidance for all

The system will have at its heart a framework of guidance to enable individuals to plan and manage their individual learning and working careers, and make the best use of higher education in all its forms. This will reflect the increasing frequency and complexity of choices which individuals will have to make about both learning and employment, and waste of resources and motivation arising from ill informed choice. Guidance will be central component of the system, and a basic entitlement at entry, during and on exit from learning programmes. Guidance will assist all learners to plan routes and make choices, in learning and work, and to develop the skills to do so with increasing confidence. Guidance will be explicitly linked to the tutorial and recording functions outlined below.

provide tutoring for all

The bridge between the individual learner and the subject is the tutorial function, which may be delivered in a variety of ways. Mechanisms will exist to ensure that individuals receive appropriate individual support to develop a coherent personal body of knowledge, understanding and skills, guided by specialists in the academic field in which they are studying. This will be particularly important where learners are drawing on opportunities from diverse fields and programmes.

Institutions will also have strategies to encourage mutual support between learners, recognising the power of such strategies to reinforce learning and reflection, and the importance of developing the skills of supporting other people's learning in the whole population.

record achievement

Processes of recording achievement will be developed on a consistent lifelong basis throughout post school education, with three purposes: to assist learners in planning and pursuing their individual learning programmes, to encourage the development of the skills of reflection on practice and learning, and to provide an ongoing record of achievement to supplement the results of formal assessment, recognising the full range and variety of learning achievement.

ensure equity

All learners will be equitably treated. Procedures for selection and progression will not place special barriers in the way of people on the basis of age, gender, disability or ethnicity. Quality assurance systems will ensure that individuals did not receive an inferior service as a result of such factors, or as a result of personal circumstances affecting the time or mode of study. Statements of entitlement will indicate clearly how these issues were to be addressed, and monitoring procedures, and regular reporting systems, will ensure that the objectives were achieved.

The system will recognise the need to develop the potential of those with disabilities of various kinds and will offer those who need it:

- appropriately adapted buildings and equipment
- guidance and counselling
- physical assistance
- appropriately adapted curriculum
- support and advocacy to find appropriate specialist facilities where these are in short supply

There will also be staff development support for those working with disabled learners for the first time.

4.3 A Curriculum Framework

The aim of curriculum design will be the creation of lifelong independent learners. Teaching and learning strategies used in higher education will be designed to encourage success, to develop processes of reflection and critical thinking, and to involve learners in the negotiation, control and management of their own learning. They will draw on the practical experience of learners, as well as established bodies of knowledge and current research. The system will:

agree a curriculum model

The curriculum will offer learners at least:

- mechanisms to negotiate individual learning routes and contracts, using practical experience in employment and community life
- support for the lifelong development of personal transferable skills
- support for the development of skills for autonomous learning
- an introduction, and ongoing access to, specialist knowledge and skills, and the languages and cultures of particular professions
- opportunities to participate in the processes of research through which knowledge is created and refined
- attention to issues which underpin the functioning of a plural, tolerant and learning society

define the core curriculum

A part of the entitlement to higher education will be support to develop and maintain the qualities and skills needed for lifelong independent learning. These will include the explicit development of core and study skills, personal transferable skills, decision making and planning skills and knowledge of sources of support and information. The aim will be to strengthen each individual's ability to integrate their own practice in paid and unpaid work and learning.

diversify course structures

Programmes and institutional structures will be designed to encourage progression. This will be conceived not merely in terms of ascending "level" of learning, but of growing diversity, recognising that broadening and deepening knowledge are equally valid ways of progressing, that boundaries between disciplines are constantly shifting, and that an important source of creativity is cross reference between fields. Progression between learning in the institution, the workplace and the

community will be actively encouraged through the measurement of achievement within a common credit framework.

Courses would be organised to allow the maximum number of entry and exit points, to allow individuals to build flexible individual routes, and to undertake learning in small stages where their other commitments require this.

guarantee range

While diversity is important, so is the right to a basic range of service for all those eligible to participate . Since the new, predominantly adult, student population is less mobile, mechanisms will exist to ensure that a guaranteed basic range of higher education is provided in all regions, with mechanisms for delivering this to those who prefer to study at a distance.

diversify teaching and learning

Teaching strategies will help learners to understand and develop their repertoire of learning styles, and teachers to respond more consciously to these. Teaching and assessment processes will be designed to encourage deep rather than surface learning, encouraging learners to reflect on and integrate their learning into evolving personal frameworks of knowledge and experience.

Open and flexible learning opportunities will be available for those who prefer to study in this way, or for whom it is the most economical, or the only possible, way of undertaking particular kinds of study.

Learning resource centres will be available to individuals, employers, professions and communities, often but not necessarily, based on higher education institutions. Such centres will encourage and support the broad and flexible use of the knowledge resource of higher education, and stimulate learning activity in other organisations, including other educational institutions, voluntary bodies and self help groups.

exploit learning technology

Higher education will make extensive use of information technology in all its forms, to foster more frequent and flexible forms of communication between teachers, learners and the world of work, to disseminate knowledge more widely and rapidly, and to foster independent learning.

ensure equity

Programmes will recognise and respond to the curricular implications of a more diverse student body and a more global community. They will give more overt attention to the perspectives and achievements of women, and of other cultures and ethnic groups, not only in the humanities and social

sciences, but in science and technology, where the aspirations of women and minority groups have not always been recognised.

support development

Support will be available to assist staff and institutions to develop curricula to meet changing needs. Nationally there will be agencies with a remit to keep curriculum development under continuing review, both generally and in specific disciplines and professions, and to support leading edge innovation. Individual institutions will have their own mechanisms for promoting ongoing curriculum review, through the processes of course review and validation, and through specific projects.

4.4 A Framework for Credit

A coherent national credit framework will provide the underpinning for all qualifications, whether work based or academic, at all levels from basic education to postgraduate learning. This will enable individuals to acquire and accumulate credit, and to transfer it between institutions and programmes, encouraging recurrent learning, and mobility. The framework will make it possible to combine achievement within the academic system, with credit from national vocational qualifications, and guidance will be available to assist learners to plan coherent programmes to meet their individual needs.

Accreditation will be inclusive: designed to recognise a wide range of achievement, rather than to exclude people. Qualifications will be constructed from credits, recognising the importance of coherence, but allowing for the constant reshaping of fields of knowledge and professions. Guidance systems will ensure that individuals are helped to make choices which contribute to their personal learning and working careers. The framework will:

provide a credit framework

Assessment and accreditation will be available for all achievement at higher levels, and it will be possible to use that credit as a basis for progression, for admission to further programmes, or to accumulate towards a qualification. Credit will be available for relatively small units of achievement, recognising the intermittent nature of study for many learners, and the very specific needs often addressed. Credit systems will also be designed to assist transfer between academic and vocational qualification systems (in so far as the distinction remains), and across national boundaries.

Qualifications will be defined in terms of learning outcomes (what an individual can do or know, rather than what process s/he has been through), to provide learners, employers teachers and others with the clearest possible view of what has been achieved. This will make it easier to award credit for experiential learning, and learning in domestic and voluntary contexts as well as formal education and paid work.

Learning programmes will normally be individually constructed from a range of modules, designed to be coherent in terms of the individual's own needs, the necessary disciplines of the subject/s studied, and the requirements of professional practice. Less emphasis will be given to large qualifications like the first degree, and individuals will be able to acquire credit progressively over a lifetime. Increasingly individuals and employers will see the lifelong credit transcript as more important than the particular qualifications.

develop assessment

Assessment will be primarily based on explicit criteria, with the aim of accrediting all who reach the specification, rather than a set proportion of candidates. Assessment, including assessment of prior learning, for the purposes of entry, progression and certification, will be available on demand, supported by guidance if necessary, to anyone who believed that they could satisfy the criteria, whether or not they had chosen to participate in particular programmes.

extend accreditation

Since much higher education will take place in the workplace and the community, opportunities to assess achievement in such contexts will be provided. A variety of people and agencies will be involved in assessment, recognising both the practical economies of such arrangements, and the need, in many cases, for current practical experience on the part of assessors. The involvement of people outside the formal higher education system in this way will strengthen the links between higher education and the communities which it serves.

open access

In a more flexible and intermittent system the notion of "entry" to higher education becomes less important, since people will be repeatedly "entering" and reentering. Access to tuition, assessment and accreditation will be on the basis of ability to benefit, without barriers based on class, gender, disability or ethnic origin. Assessment at entry will be designed to guide individual choice and to maximise the match between individual learning need and institutional offer, and since guidance will be available, and explicit statements of requirements and expectations of particular programmes will be published, the decision to participate will normally rest with the learner.

4.5 A Diverse System

Diverse purposes

Higher education will serve many personal, work related, social and economic purposes, which interlock and support each other in complex ways. It will be recognised that the wealth of the community includes its intellectual, moral and social capital, as well as its gross domestic product, and that higher education has an important function in developing and maintaining all these, as well as contributing new knowledge and skills to the economy. As the links between learning and society become more dynamic and active there will be a growing emphasis on the development of knowledge in use.

Diverse learners

A much larger proportion of the population will take part in higher education at some stage of their lives, and many will enter and reenter repeatedly. A much smaller proportion will be in continuous "full time" residential study. Learners will be more diverse, in age, social and cultural background, circumstances, motivation and ways of learning, and institutions and programmes will be adapted to this. Entry routes and destinations will be more diverse, and a much wider range of people will have had some experience of higher education.

Diverse programmes

Learning programmes will be diverse in purpose, content and length. Some will be offered intensively: others intermittently or part-time. They will be delivered in a variety of modes, locations and times. Many will be provided on an open or distance learning basis, and new technologies will be widely used for the distribution of whole programmes and for remote communication between teachers and learners.

Diverse structures

The elements of higher education - teaching, assessment, accreditation, research and consultancy - will be provided in a range of institutions and agencies, including universities and colleges, employers, professional bodies, and commercial organisations, and perhaps in voluntary organisations. Some will offer a broad range of services: others will specialise in particular curricular areas or functions. Some institutions will offer both higher education and other forms of education or training. Some will concentrate on work with particular groups, while others will make a broad offer to the whole of their local or regional community.

Institutions will publish mission statements, outlining their policies on issues such as access, and they will compete with each other on the basis of this explicit information about what each offers, on what terms, and with what achieved outcomes. Collaboration between institutions, to provide coherent and planned access and progression routes, or share scarce human or material resources, will be common.

4.6 Accountability and Quality

Quality is fundamentally a matter of fitness for purpose. The development, maintenance and monitoring of quality in higher education must therefore reflect the diversity of needs which it meets and the multiple interests to which it is accountable, including learners, employers, government, academic and professional communities. It will do this by making criteria and standards explicit and open to public scrutiny and debate. These will focus especially on the outcomes of higher education, and the value which it adds to individuals and the economy. Staff development will be used to improve the quality of provision, and to ensure that all staff are involved in its development.

extend ownership

Systems for quality assurance (assessment, audit and control), including validation and inspection, will involve a wide range of interest groups, including learners, funders, managers, professional bodies, employers and Governors, as well as the traditional sources - the discipline communities, professional bodies, and the university itself.

make criteria public

Quality criteria will be explicit and public, making clear what standards represent, what can be expected, and the nature of the contract between learner and educator.

integrate functions

Quality assurance systems will be concerned with all the roles of higher education, including the creation and transmission of knowledge and skills, and the personal development of individual learners. They will encourage integrated approaches to quality, like those of professional education, where the collective knowledge base of the profession is developed through the education of its members, rather than stressing distinctions, like those between teaching and research.

use feedback

There will be explicit mechanisms to ensure that the views and experience of learners and potential learners are reported back to teachers and managers to influence future curriculum and staff development.

monitor performance

Monitoring systems will record the outcomes and effectiveness of institutions in a comprehensible and public form, and management information systems will give at least as much attention to the achievements of learners, and the value which higher education adds to them, as to the deployment of resources. Monitoring will also provide a

coherent and ongoing base of information about the system as a whole, recording who is participating, in what and with what outcomes, what kind of service particular groups are receiving, and what they are achieving.

ensure consistency

Special arrangements will ensure the quality of work which crosses institutional and cross sectoral boundaries, especially in fields like credit and franchising, where consistency and rigour are especially important if learners are not to lose motivation at points of transition.

publish information

Information on the performance of the system, its institutions and its learners would be published regularly and widely in accessible forms, to encourage public and professional debate about purposes, achievements and development.

develop human resources

Substantial resource will be devoted to continuing professional development for those who work in higher education as teachers and support staff, recognising that quality can only be maintained through the competence and commitment of staff.

4.7 Resourcing - a plural system

Funding systems will reflect the benefits of higher education both to the individual and the community, and seek to increase investment from both public and private sources. Government and employers will recognise that, in a knowledge and skill based economy, continuing learning is an investment (comparable to investment in plant or paid research and development), rather than a cost. This will be recognised in conventions of accounting, and the taxation system. A particular concern will be to ensure that funding systems do not discourage participation, and do not discriminate against those who have benefitted least from education in the past.

target public funds

Public funds will be used for four purposes:

- to guarantee a basic entitlement to all those able to benefit from higher education
- to support the additional costs involved in providing for particular groups (like learners with disabilities) who will otherwise be unable to participate on an equal basis
- to stimulate individual and employer investment through taxation and loan systems
- to support work in specific areas of national priority

develop private funds

Funds from individual learners and employers will be used to extend participation in learning beyond the basic entitlement, or to address particular needs specific to an individual employer or industry. They will not be used to substitute for the basic public resourcing of the system.

Employers will be encouraged to treat the intellectual capital of their organisations as an economic asset, and devote as much effort to creating and maintaining it, as to capital investment. They will support both specific learning related to current needs, and more general learning through employee development schemes, stimulating participation in a broader range of activities, many of which may prove, in the long run, to be routes to vocational qualification or degrees, and to future development for the business.

distinguish maintenance

Learners' maintenance costs will be distinguished from tuition costs, recognising that it is the responsibility of the individual to support him or herself, but that many learners may need to defer paying these costs when

they cease earning in order to study. It is necessary to distinguish at least three groups of learner:

- those "developers" or "enrichers" who are learning in parallel with paid employment, or in retirement, who will probably not need to call on outside funds to meet most living costs

- those "developers" learning in breaks between employment, who might need temporary financial assistance, perhaps through relatively short term loans

- the "beginners" and "returners" for whom participation will be impossible without external financial support to meet living costs, including sometimes the costs of supporting dependent children, partners and parents. There is a particular case for public support in relation to long term unemployed people for whom participation in higher education may be the way back into the workforce.

Subsidised loans might have a role to play in supporting the living costs of higher education participants who might otherwise be prevented from participating.

redeploy resources

The changes proposed in higher education will result in a redistribution of resources within and between institutions and agencies. Greater resources will be committed to guidance, assessment, and accreditation and less to teaching in the traditional sense. Greater resources will also be devoted to the operation and management of resource based and open learning systems, and to assessment and accreditation in new locations, including workplaces and community settings.

fund learners

Public funding for learners' fees will aim to stimulate participation and achievement, ensure access and support equity, and seek to encourage individuals to continue to invest time and money in higher education. The mechanisms used to manage such public funds will reflect these principles.

Loan schemes will have the expansion of participation as their primary aim, complementing, rather than replacing, the basic entitlements, and with inbuilt subsidy reflecting the balance between public and private benefit from participation. Loan repayment will be related to ability to pay, and spread over a sufficiently long period not to discourage participation.

Voucher/credit schemes will be used as one channel through which public money can be used to ensure equity and give individual learners purchasing power in the system.

fund institutions

The purpose of public funding for institutions will be to ensure institutional diversity and quality, the maintenance of work in specialist and developing fields, and a reasonable degree of stability. A proportion of public funding for higher education will be paid directly to institutions, to reflect these priorities.

fund programmes

Funding mechanisms will seek to ensure value for money, while recognising the range of costs involved in different kinds of provision, the need for some relatively expensive approaches if access and equity objectives are to be achieved.

develop human resources

The human resource of the higher education system is its greatest asset, and all those working within it will be seen as continuing learners. Systematic procedures will be in place to ensure that all staff employed in higher education were continuously participating in learning, including learning related to their functions as teachers and supporters of learning. Like the learners, many higher education staff (teachers, researchers, consultants) will move between the educational institution and the other workplaces, a significant number will be working in both simultaneously, and a variety of forms of employment contract will encourage this. A substantial programme of induction and ongoing staff development will be available to help staff to acquire and develop their teaching, assessment and learning skills.

A higher proportion of the staff of institutions will be employed in support roles, in fields like counselling, career planning, recording achievement, and the design and production of teaching materials, while many academics will spend a larger proportion of their time preparing materials for open and distance learning, and providing tutorial support to learners.

redeploy capital resources

A system in which more learners are part-time, workbased and studying on an open learning, or resource based basis, will need different kinds of buildings, and physical resources. Buildings will be designed to support these alternative modes of study, and to be accessible for most of the day and most of the year. In many cases partnerships between higher education institutions, employers and other agencies will provide access to specialist equipment and facilities or more convenient locations for study.

5 How far have we come?

This chapter takes the elements of the vision which we have proposed and outlines how far the system has moved towards the ideal.

5.1 Cultural change

Lifelong

Many people working in higher education, and many institutions, have yet to recognise the implications of lifelong learning. Even among those institutions with a high proportion of mature students, institutional structures and expectations are still primarily based around the needs of young people: adults remain the "invisible majority", and words like "student", "learner" and "graduate" are usually assumed to refer to young people.

Learner centred

Although the notion that the national interest is best served by empowering individuals (rather than by "managing" them) has gained considerable ground (supported, among others, by the CBI), it is not clear how far this is understood or supported in practice by higher education institutions or employers. In higher education, the debate about learner centredness has not yet effectively addressed the tension between the desire to accredit a wider range of achievement (which promotes individual empowerment and autonomy) and the desire to ensure that individuals come to terms with major bodies of established knowledge (which preserves a particular kind of quality at the expense of individualisation).

Achievement

Recent developments in schools and vocational qualifications (the creation of GCSE, National Vocational Qualifications and General National Vocational Qualifications/"vocational A levels") have sought to certify achievement, rather than identify failure. However, quality continues to be widely associated with exclusion, and there is a powerful cultural resistance in Britain to defining educational achievement in positive rather than negative terms.

Proactivity

Public debate about the relationship between higher education and the economy often fails to recognise the complexity of the interlock between the two worlds, and too much debate still rests on the assumption that higher education provides the skills which employers need. The driving forces of the future economy will be smaller organisations, highly skilled, and knowledge based. Higher education will need new kinds of partnership with such firms and may often need to lead, rather than follow, the labour market, feeding ideas in, rather than waiting for them to be demanded. Despite the absence of wide public recognition, many institutions have been making progress, through partnership degrees, reshaping of work placement schemes and strategies for promoting and accrediting learning in the

workplace. Schemes like the Government's High Technology National Training programme, which funded new postgraduate programmes at the leading edge of technologies, and Graduate Gateways, which enabled small employers to work with graduates for the first time, both contributed to increasing the impact of higher education on the economy. With a growing proportion of people learning alongside employment, many of them studying in fields where they have substantial practical experience, some of the traditional distinctions between "teaching" and "research" will have less meaning.

Diversity

There is much diversity in British higher education, and its devolved structures have allowed much imaginative innovation. Different institutions, departments and individual staff are good at work in particular subject areas, and across subject boundaries, with particular age, social, ethnic or gender based groups, and with groups that embrace all these. They provide opportunities in many modes, using a wide range of teaching and learning strategies, providing whole degrees by open learning and accredited prior learning and offering programmes at a range of levels and lengths. However, the same devolution which allows innovation has also allowed good practice in one department of an institution to be unknown in another.

Because the extent of this diversity is hidden, and rarely recognised even within institutions, the system's potential to respond to many individual needs is frustrated, and a potential strength becomes a weakness. In the absence of adequate information, of mechanisms to ensure some consistency of opportunity across regions, and to ensure that individuals are appropriately matched with opportunities, diversity becomes inconsistency. In this way learners may find themselves pursuing inappropriate studies, even when something appropriate was available.

Although institutions have been encouraged to define their missions more clearly, there is still a widespread and unhelpful tendency to reduce complexity to a small number of simple indicators, an approach which discourages diversity. As a result; an individual may choose to study at a "high status" institution, unaware that its reputation relates to its performance in research, or in other subject areas, and that the quality of its pastoral care, flexibility or teaching is actually poor.

Explicitness

Most of those who pay for and participate in higher education (learners, employers and government) have a clear interest in what learners will be able to do, know and understand when they leave. This makes a greater emphasis on outcome essential to opening higher education to a wider clientele. As yet, the development of ways of describing outcomes is in its infancy, although work is gathering pace, and some institutions now require courses to be formally described in learning outcome terms when presented for validation or revalidation.

5.2 Learner Support

Entitlement and negotiation

Many institutions have begun to define what they offer their learners more explicitly, and the launch of the national student charters has encouraged this. However, such documents provide only a first step towards equal negotiation between learners and providers. More work is needed to extend the range and detail of what is covered, and to develop better ways of describing processes and outcomes. There remain many anomalies in the system, and the level of support and access to services which individuals receive continues to differ widely according to location and personal factors.

Guidance

In a learner centred higher education institution guidance functions will be central, rather than peripheral, and expertise in guidance has been developing steadily in the 1980s. In the past the National Educational Guidance Initiative, the National Institute of Careers Education and Counselling and CNAA have contributed to this, and work is now in hand on qualifications and quality through the Lead Body for Advice Guidance and Counselling, the National Advisory Council for Careers and Educational Guidance and the Employment Department.

However, a number of reports have pointed out the lack of a strategic approach to guidance within most higher education institutions. The relationships between educational and careers guidance, counselling and the curriculum are rarely explicit, or followed through in management structures, and the weakening of tutorial support systems under the pressure of deteriorating staff:student ratios is aggravating this. Many existing services have been designed around the needs of young people, and it is not always clear how far these approaches will be appropriate to the new, adult, clientele.

Learning contracts

Many institutions have sought to develop forms of "learning contract", under which the individual learner, higher education institution and employer agree formally what is to be learned, and how it is to be assessed and accredited. To date such contracts have been concentrated in more explicitly workbased and post-experience work, where they give the parties a clearer focus, and a basis for negotiating individual programmes, linked to the needs of learner, subject and the workplace. Although contracts can be powerful motivators, such strategies have not yet been extended widely beyond the directly work related curriculum, and more work is needed to develop cost effective approaches across the full range of higher education.

Recording achievement

Recording achievement serves two purposes: as a tool for reflective learning (notably in relation to work placement and experience); and as evidence for

accreditation or employment selection. Recording systems have been developing rapidly in schools, further and vocational education, partly driven by the development of the National Record of Achievement through the National Council for Vocational Qualifications. A growing number of professional bodies and employers are introducing similar systems for recording continuing professional development and updating. However, these processes are only beginning to influence higher education, mainly at the point of entry, although several regional consortia of HE and FE institutions are now developing broader systems.

Although the benefits to individual learners are widely recognised, a number of issues remain unresolved. These include how far it is possible or desirable to develop uniform procedures and formats for records, which at present take many forms, across institutions and sectors. This issue is particularly important where records or portfolios are to be used in selection for employment or admission to learning programmes, since a recording system which presents an unmanageable volume of material, or which presents it in inconsistent formats is liable to be ignored by selectors, especially where there are many candidates.

Tutoring

The tutorial system is one of the most powerful and distinctive traditions of British higher education, and the learner centred higher education which we advocate will include many of its principles. In its ideal form it ensured the development by each learners of a coherent but personal body of skills, knowledge and understanding. It did this by providing an ongoing dialogue between tutor and learner where the tutor helped to steer the learning, while encouraging reflection and critical thinking. In a more fragmented education system, where learners are studying intermittently on modular schemes, and there is no consistent course group to provide peer support, the tutorial role becomes doubly important.

However, the ideal tutorial model was never very widespread, and was unpredictable, particularly because of its dependence on individual matching of student and tutor. Deteriorating staff student ratios have led to its disappearance in many of those institutions which adopted it. Alternative ways of addressing the issue are being explored through programmes focusing on transferable skills, and careers education, and a number of institutions have been building these notions into coherent curriculum models, for departments, faculties or whole institutions. Some institutions are experimenting with structured peer tutoring within institutions, where students "teach" or support each other on an individual or group basis within a framework set by the institution. As yet the potential of such approaches to support learning and to provide models of the learning profession, organisation and society which can carry over into the wider community is neither widely recognised, nor widely developed.

Equity

All higher education institutions have equal opportunities policies, and seek to avoid discrimination in recruitment and internal processes, and the balance of the student population in terms of gender and age has shifted significantly in recent years. The work of the Access Course Recognition Group has made a significant

contribution to opening access to "non traditional" learners, both by guaranteeing the quality of access course certificates and by stimulating debate, curriculum development, and cross sectoral collaboration. Disabled learners remain substantially underrepresented in the system as a whole, and the issues of disabled access continue to neglect the diversity of needs within the overall "disabled" category. The Funding Councils have encouraged institutions to address some of the equity issues through the Widening Participation initiative, following the positive lead set in the past by the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council.

A key issue remains the monitoring of participation, where some data necessary for policy evaluation is simply not collected, and many institutions have policies which their management information systems cannot evaluate. The recent addition of ethnic monitoring to national statistics is an important step forward, but will be of limited usefulness until data has been accumulated over some years.

Ensuring participation is only a first step. It is even more important to examine what particular groups participate in, and with what outcomes. There is a danger that those previously excluded will be admitted only to "lower status" institutions or departments or fields, or that fields will come to be defined as "low status" precisely because of their recruitment from previously excluded groups. There is also concern that the present financial pressures, the scale of demand for higher education, and the use of inappropriate performance measures, will discourage institutions from recruiting from this more diverse pool of potential learners. When numbers press, the temptation is to avoid those who need more individual treatment, or specialist knowledge, and changes in funding systems may have a disproportionate impact on such learners.

5.3 Curriculum

A curriculum model

The notion that there is something which can be called a curriculum in higher education is a relatively recent one, since the strong disciplinary and professional traditions of the Universities have tended to underplay the common strands which unite all higher education. The impact of increasing flexibility and modularisation, the demands of employers and the diversity of career routes which graduates take have all led to a reconsideration of what is expected of a graduate, and how higher education develops those qualities. This has led to an increased interest in issues of coherence, progression, and a "core curriculum". A small, but growing, number of institutions have gone as far as to define a curriculum model, sometimes based on the explicit development of learner autonomy or "capability".

Core curriculum

There is no nationwide consensus on what a core curriculum might be. It can be argued that it has always been implicit in the notion of the "degree" and the "graduate", but as expansion and diversification of the student body has changed the nature of the student experience it has become less clear how, and whether, these core qualities are actually being developed. The issue was raised starkly by the UDACE work on Learning Outcomes, and initiatives like the Employment Department's Enterprise in Higher Education programme, and the Higher Education for Capability movement have encouraged universities to explore the development of core and transferable skills in all programmes. Similar issues are raised by the development of General National Vocational Qualifications. Information technology also implies a shift in the skills which learners will need from the retention of knowledge to the skills of accessing and managing it.

Where the notion of a core has been developed, it has been seen as a skills based one, focusing on the ability to use the knowledge and understanding which have been traditionally used to define subjects and disciplines. In this sense, the "core" complements the traditional subject curriculum, and an example of this approach would be the "core professional criteria" developed by the ASSET project for qualifications in social work and engineering.

Range

The definition of a minimum range of higher education in a region is not an issue which has been widely debated, but growing regionalism, the growth of a less mobile adult student body and closer links between higher education institutions and their regions makes it pressing one. The issue has been recognised in the further education sector, where the FE Funding Council's Regional Committees have to ensure that regional coverage is adequate. In the higher education sector, however, no specific body has such a remit, nor is there a consensus about what it might look like. This is an area where informed debate is needed, both on how a minimum range might be defined, and on what kind of mechanism might be

needed to ensure its delivery, bearing in mind that at degree and postgraduate level, every qualification is unique to that Department or institution.

Course structures

Higher education is already much more flexible than many people recognise, but, culturally, the higher education system remains dominated by the notion of the three year full-time first degree, which represents the "gold standard" of the system. In reality, only one in three of entrants to higher education is the classic 19 year old full time first degree student, and even with the inclusion of mature entrants a bare 40% are on full time first degree programmes. However, the status of intermediate qualifications (certificates and diplomas) remains confusing, and progress towards a system of "more and shorter ladders", with entry and exit points more widely dispersed through the system is still slow.

Probably a majority of institutions are in the process of modularising their curricula to some degree, and over time the opportunity to construct more flexible and individualised programmes which this offers are likely to be increasingly used, even though in the early stages this is rare. It seems likely that the pattern of course lengths, and of qualifications, will become more diverse.

Teaching and learning

The last decade has seen a burgeoning of interest in teaching and learning in higher education, simulated partly by the problems generated by declining staff student ratios, and by the introduction of staff appraisal and quality audit. Staff development units have been created at national and institutional level, and institutions have created separate units and budgets for stimulating innovation. National resources have been injected into innovation by the HE Funding Councils through programmes on Teaching and Learning Technology and Effective Teaching and Assessment, and by the Employment Department through Enterprise in Higher Education and its Higher Education Development Fund. In a number of institutions, including some of the more traditional universities, new senior posts, as Professors or Pro Vice-Chancellors responsible for teaching and learning have been created.

However, more remains to be done, especially in the context of an adult system. Outstanding issues include the relationship between teaching and research, where there needs to be more examination of how far the separation is good for learning and for the development of the knowledge base of society, at least in some subject areas and for mature learners. Progress has also been modest in the development of more negotiated approaches to the curriculum.

Progress on the support of open and independent learning has also been slow in most higher education institutions, although the work of the Open University and the National Extension College have continued to provide inspiration for development, and the Open University remains the largest higher education institution. Many institutions see the development of more open approaches as a necessity, but the start up costs of development, of materials, staff and equipment, is substantial. However, there has been a steady expansion of the quantity and

range of material available for more independent learning, and resource based learning in institutions, and the Open Learning Foundation is seeking to realise the economies of scale possible from cross institutional collaboration.

Technology

Higher education has not yet exploited the full potential of technology to provide access for those unable or unwilling to attend institutions, as a means of facilitating learning, of providing access to information and knowledge, or to provide remote interaction between learners and teachers. Apart from the work of the Open University there was little coherent development work on the use of communication technologies within higher education. The potential of technology is not widely understood among academic staff, and there is a clear need to develop and disseminate good practice. The Higher Education Funding Council has sought to address this through its Teaching and Learning Technology Programme.

Use of new technology raises particular management issues because it calls for a redistribution of roles, resources and responsibilities, for both management and curriculum, within the higher education system as a whole. Some functions like the use of satellites, for example, may need to be managed at an international level, while resource based learning calls for a shift in the deployment of staff time from course delivery to materials preparation. Some functions, like individual access to hardware, or tutorial support, will call for local resourcing of new kinds. As technology makes knowledge more widely and rapidly available and reproducible, it raises serious issues about intellectual property rights, and about familiar notions like "plagiarism" in student's work.

There are also issues about the ownership of the means of distribution. As privately owned electronic systems replace publicly accessible books, there may be a narrowing, rather than extending of access, producing a society divided between the information rich, who will have much easier access to far more information, from the information poor who may have less.

Curriculum development

Curriculum development in higher education is necessarily complex, since disciplines and professional cultures are strongly distinct. Support for such development is currently available from a range of sources, including some higher education institutions which provide nationwide services, operating in general on a commercial or semi commercial basis. There is no acknowledged national focus of the kind which has been provided in Further Education by the Further Education Unit and Staff College, or by the National Curriculum Council for schools. This function may develop through the HE Quality Council, but there would be issues to be resolved about the relationship between quality audit and development activity, since the provision of development services by the body which is itself reviewing quality raises problems of authority and ownership. Alternatively, we may see the growth of this role within existing, or new, professional and discipline based bodies.

5.4 Credit

Progression

The nature of progression for lifelong adult learners is not well understood, and is, in any event, changing. When higher education was primarily concerned with young people completing their initial education, the notion of progression was an extension of that used in schools, based on a combination of increasing intellectual complexity and maturity. However, lifelong learners may choose to move "horizontally" as well as "vertically", and the system should encourage both the person with high level technical qualifications who wishes to develop "lower" level managerial skills in mid career, and the returner who wishes to build on the maturity and experience of management developed in raising a family and running a home with a career in teaching or social work. What is a logical, and perhaps the only rational, route for a 19 year old, may not be relevant to a returner in her late 30s. It is easy for funding and management systems to neglect this, and opportunities for accreditation and qualification need to be designed to encourage rather than obstruct them.

Credit

Credit Accumulation and Transfer Schemes (CATS) have been developed in post-school education and training for a variety of purposes. The common strand is the desire to recognise smaller units of learning achievement through the award of credit, which can then be used, in appropriate combinations, to acquire qualifications. The key principles are the recognition of small units, making intermittent and part-time participation easier; accumulation and transfer across traditional institutional and sectoral boundaries, allowing, for example, credit accumulated in the workplace to be used in a degree, or credit earned in community work to be used towards a vocational qualification; and the distinction between "general" and "specific" credit, which enables individuals to acquire general credit, but universities to retain control over what that credit is worth in relation to a specific award.

The CNAA CATS system has been in operation in a number of higher education institutions for some years, especially in association with the accreditation of work based learning, and of prior learning for accelerated entry. Although a growing number of higher education institutions have adopted the scheme, in most cases it remains marginal, and often learners continue to pursue credit rated courses without making use of the added flexibility available. At the same time regional Open College Networks (OCNs) have developed credit based, cross institutional CATS systems in most of the major metropolitan areas, all involving universities with other education and training providers. The National Council for Vocational Qualifications' framework of occupational standards and unit based qualifications, which now define the roles of over 80% of the workforce, is not formally a credit system, but shares many features.

In 1992, the Further Education Unit proposed the creation of a national credit framework to embrace all these structures through a set of common definitions of

level and volume of credit, with a view to making progression and accumulation a reality across academic, vocational, schools, adult higher and further education. This proposal was welcomed in further education and elsewhere, but has yet to command the support of some of the key agencies.

The Higher Education Quality Council is currently studying the development of CATS systems within higher education, and will make its recommendations at the end of 1993. A problem with development will be lack of understanding of the principles, among the general public and among those within higher education and the world of work, and there are also substantial technical issues to be resolved, about notions of level, credit, progression and coherence, and ways of describing and assessing learning outcomes.

Outcomes

The key shift in the development of qualifications is the move from process to outcome based approaches, in which changes in the school curriculum and vocational qualifications are both playing a major part. The ground for change is being prepared by work on learning outcomes in higher education, experience of higher level work in Management through the Management Charter Initiative, and the Employment Department's Workbased Learning project programme. Some Universities are now building outcome statements into the revalidation of all degree programmes, and the shift towards making the outcomes of higher education more explicit, and therefore more open to negotiation and alternative modes of accreditation is likely to make the system as a whole more open to adult learners. These developments may be strengthened by the Government's commitment to the overall qualification reform, and the use, by employers and government of NVQs as a means of setting targets for educational institutions and funding systems through, for example, the National Education and Training Targets.

Qualifications

For a qualifications system to be effective in motivating learning and rewarding achievement it must be comprehensible. However, for many reasons, good and bad, the qualifications system is complex and difficult to understand. Because of this, employers do not always use the information which it could provide to aid selection decisions, and the financial reward to individuals from higher levels of qualification is sometimes minimal.

The creation of the national framework for vocational qualifications is introducing coherence into the vocational system. In time this will be more widely understood, although in the short term the replacement of well known qualifications by new NVQs, and the creation alongside them of new General National Vocational Qualifications is causing some confusion. As yet, the changes are only beginning to make an impact in higher education, but in time the development of NVQs at higher levels (4 and 5) will introduce new external constraints into many of the more vocational higher education courses, and may change relationships between professional institutions, higher education and employers. If General NVQs extend to these levels, they will raise fundamental

questions about the role of traditional undergraduate education. Linkage between academic and vocational systems will be complex, not least because of different notions of level, where some postgraduate work will be NVQ level 3, while some NVQ level 4 work will be further education.

The academic system is, in one sense, simpler to understand, although the future of A levels remains unclear, and there is an live debate about the future of the classified Honours degree. The intermediate Certificate and Diploma stages below the full degree are rarely used or recognised, but there is a burgeoning of postgraduate and post-experience programmes and qualifications. One key problem lies in the fact that every higher education qualification is unique to that institution, and even to a particular time. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the potential learner, or the employer, to understand what a qualification means in terms of what a graduate knows, understands or can do. Making this structure flexible, responsive and comprehensible is a clear priority, and it is this need which proposals for a national credit framework address.

Assessment

Assessment in higher education has only recently become a subject of major debate. Anxieties about quality and the costs of assessment in an expanding system, the development of more diverse learning routes, APL, and outcome based approaches to learning have all contributed to raising its profile. Staff and institutions are beginning to recognise the extent to which traditional approaches neglect the important and overvalue the trivial, how little use is being made of the range of assessment approaches available, and how difficult they may be to apply with the rise of new approaches to teaching and learning, especially where project, resource or group based learning is involved, or where assessment has to take place in unfamiliar contexts.

This is a major development area for the next few years and interest is growing, both in the technical aspects of assessment, in its resourcing, and in the development of formal institutional assessment strategies. Development in vocational qualifications raises the possibility of introducing assessment on demand, which would represent a radical challenge to traditional practices.

Open access

Open access systems, with entry primarily on the basis of self assessment, exist in other countries, but are usually associated with higher education dominated by young people and with high non-completion rates. At present the only British higher education institution which operates in this way is the Open University, but its experience (working with an exclusively adult clientele), is that clear preliminary material, counselling and carefully structured foundation programmes, linked to a unit credit system, remove the need for high entry barriers. Open access on this basis would represent a shift of resources from selection, an unproductive use of staff time, with a negative impact on lifelong learner motivation, to guidance, which can be a positive experience for all participants.

Alternative entry routes to higher education have grown. This has included both the expansion of long standing special entry arrangements, and the development and formalising of the place of Access Courses as the "third route" of entry to first degree programmes. Processes for the accreditation of prior learning in some institutions have enabled individuals to enter with advanced standing, although, despite much promotion, this option is still a marginal one. However, it is likely to grow in importance as understanding of the techniques develops, led especially by its vigorous promotion in the world of vocational qualifications. The General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) was designed (inter alia) to provide a more vocational entry route to higher education, and although its early development focused strongly on young people, it may in time have implications for adult entry. Finally, the growth of employer based employee development programmes has stimulated participation in learning among the workforce of a number of large employers. These learners, often drawn from groups who are traditional non-participants, have begun to filter into higher education.

5.5 Accountability and Quality

Centralising and devolving

There have been significant shifts in the location of power and accountability within the system. The two major Education Acts of 1989 and 1991 have changed the nature of central Government's control over the system, while the creation of the funding councils has produced a new locus of central power, bringing together the different traditions of the old and new universities. The linking of funding explicitly to quality assessment for research and teaching has shifted accountability significantly to this new centre. At the same time, the HE Quality Council's Audit processes are beginning to influence what is valued by institutions.

Similar processes of centralisation and devolution have been at work within institutions, where power and authority over resources have often been devolved from the institution to the faculty or department, while power over some curricular issues has been taken from the Departments to the centre. Centralisation has the potential to make change for good easier to accomplish, but it also makes it more likely that a single mistake will have major repercussions throughout the system. Thus, a single misjudgment about the design of performance indicators for a whole system can inflict much more damage than individual local decisions could in the past.

"Customers"

The balancing of priorities in quality assurance will always be problematic, since the various customers of the system (learners, teachers, support staff, managers, employers, the State and the community) do not have identical interests. However, the issue can be addressed through the involvement of a wider range of interests in the quality assurance processes themselves, and through the opening up of public debate, backed by the publication of better and more relevant information. There have been moves to involve a wider circle in the processes of quality assurance, through lay involvement in quality audit, and increasingly through student satisfaction questionnaires and surveys of employer opinion. In the schools sector, inspection teams now always include lay people.

Profiling diversity

A diverse system will seek to match the profile of individual learning needs to individual opportunities, not to rank all potential participants against a single hierarchy of institutions and programmes. However, attempts to produce simple "league tables", while they represent a first step towards making the purposes and achievements of higher education more open to public debate, have so far tended to discourage diversity, especially where multiple scoring has been reduced to a single rank order, as if all higher education sought to pursue a single purpose. However, there are real issues about the limits of explicitness, and a key objective should be the development of ways of describing diversity which remain comprehensible and cost effective.

This issue is especially important because current systems do not recognise many of the adult issues, and the pressures of diversification and expansion may lead to important kinds of activity being undervalued. Where quality assessment is linked to funding, this can have a very damaging effect.

Teaching and research

Recent developments, under which quality has been assessed separately for teaching and research, and then related to funding, have tended to push the two apart. The argument of this paper is that the two should be converging, rather than diverging, and that professional development strategies, which recognise the intimate link between the development of individual and collective knowledge, might provide a more useful basis for a more integrated approach to quality itself.

Feedback

Traditionally higher education has done little to systematically monitor the views of learners or employers on the experience of participation, and to use such feedback as a basis for curriculum development, but institutions are increasingly putting such systems in place. Some universities have been using Enterprise in Higher Education resources to train and support course representatives to play a more active part in course monitoring and design. These processes can play a powerful role, not only in monitoring current quality and shaping course development, but also in helping students themselves to understand their own learning, and become more autonomous learners in the future, and there is room for a more widespread exchange of good practice in this area.

Monitoring

Monitoring remains a weak point in the system. Many of the critical issues for the new higher education remain undervalued or ignored in monitoring and statistical systems. We lack the models of lifelong learning, and how learners use higher education, which could provide a framework for monitoring progression, yet without these, quite inappropriate conclusions may be reached about benefits and success. A lifelong learner may, for example, have entirely sound reasons for completing only half of a course, and be entirely satisfied in terms of his or her personal objectives, but nevertheless be recorded as a "failure" or "non-completer". Similarly, the mapping of first career destinations can provide a misleading picture of progression, when older graduates take longer than young ones to find employment, and may follow different kinds of career pattern. One of the most significant gaps is the absence of longitudinal studies of graduates, which would provide evidence on the long term consequences of participation, and a base for such model building.

Cross sectoral issues

The creation of the Access Courses Recognition Group, and its Accredited Validating Agencies has contributed substantially to the bringing together of quality processes across the HE/FE boundary, as has the growth of franchised and partnership courses. The development of credit accumulation and transfer schemes, and the national credit framework, will accelerate this process, as the burgeoning Open College Networks have demonstrated in some regions. A further pressure will be the increasing involvement of higher education in the reformed vocational qualification system. Where academic qualifications incorporate elements of NVQs, they will have to operate compatible quality assurance processes, and these are likely, in time, to influence other areas of higher education.

Publication

Publication of comparative information on the performance of higher education remains very largely in the hands of the institutions themselves, although the publication of Quality Audit reports is beginning to open this more widely. Potential learners do not have ready access to critical information on, for example, qualification rates, or graduate employment records, nor do they have information about the ways in which the University interacts with its local labour markets. Institutions are understandably wary of crude indicators, which may mislead when taken out of context, but unless they are prepared individually or collectively to address the need for sufficient comparative information to enable informed choice, others will take on the role, from a less well informed base.

Human resources

There has been a notable expansion of staff development for those working in higher education. Although there continues to be no requirement for formal initial teacher training, many institutions have developed induction and ongoing staff development programmes, and participation in these is rising. Take up suggests that interest is greater among academic and support staff than was once supposed. A critical question is the extent to which such programmes are used strategically, to support the development of the curriculum and institution, as well as the narrowly defined teaching skills of academics.

Many universities have expressed interest in the Government's Investors in People programme, which aims to stimulate the development of the learning workplace. There remain particular issues for higher education, however, where the development of knowledge itself is so closely intertwined with the development of unique individuals, and institutions are more likely than most companies to build themselves and their missions around the unique body of human resource which they have. It may be worth reflecting on what lessons the higher education experience of these issues has to offer employers in the new world of knowledge based organisations and industries.

5.6 Resources

A debate

There is an ongoing debate about resourcing, as the impact of continuing growth and new modes of operation on a fixed resource base becomes apparent to all involved in higher education. However, the balance between public and private funding remains an extremely politically sensitive issue, and it is important that the debate be better informed, both in technical terms, and in understanding of the developing nature of higher education. It is also vitally important that it addresses some long standing problems, including discrimination against part-time learners and some modes of study.

Alternative models

An informed public debate requires better understanding of the alternative funding models available, and their impact on access, participation and achievement. Understandably, political parties are nervous about raising these issues, but unless they are faced, it is unlikely that the system which emerges will approximate to anyone's ideal.

Work is therefore needed to refine alternative resource models. This would need to explore the costs and benefits of higher education for individuals and society, and examine how far different approaches could support the kind of higher education which is proposed. Some studies have been done, but more work is needed on the implications from the perspective of a lifelong, rather than initial, higher education system.

The option of providing each individual with a lifetime "higher education voucher" (perhaps as part of an overall continuing education entitlement) would, in principle, put the purchasing power in the hands of the individual, strengthening motivation and encouraging responsiveness by institutions. However, there are a number of serious technical difficulties about such a scheme which need further exploration, especially in relation to pricing of services. A number of loan based models have been proposed, varying in scope and scale, in repayment method and period. A good deal is known about the technical feasibility of such schemes, and the Australian model appears to succeed in balancing the various interests and generating additional income without discouraging participation, but their likely impact on learner motivation and participation in Britain is unclear.

Expansion

The great expansion of higher education in the 1980s was not accompanied by an equivalent expansion of resources. Higher education is, as a result, now being provided more cheaply than was the case ten years ago. Although the Government's shift of resources in 1992 from higher to further education, which will slow the rate of expansion, the underlying policy is still for growth, albeit slower, and the expansion of further education will itself produce a new surge of demand for higher education in a few years' time.

For individual learners, the effect of shifting from full maintenance grants towards capped loans has been to transfer a growing proportion of the costs from public to individual sources. Many adult learners were already substantially funded from personal or employer based resources, although those most likely to have been excluded by financial constraints in the past were likely to be publicly funded, albeit on a dwindling basis.

The definition of what is, or is not, "higher education" is critical in determining what kinds of learning receive what levels of support, and learning which is, in the definition which we have offered earlier, "higher", is sometimes only available to those willing to pay most or all the cost themselves. Similarly, current funding systems discriminate against part-time modes of study, despite the fact that part-time students cost less in overall student support.

For institutions, the restrictions on funding have led to reductions in staff-student ratios, in resources for equipment and libraries, and in deterioration of the physical fabric, although a number of institutions have found ways of encouraging greater private investment to counter this. Fears have been expressed that the system may have reached the point where serious damage to quality is inevitable, although the nature of higher education's self validating quality assurance systems make this extremely difficult to prove objectively.

Changing needs

Changes in the nature of higher education, including those proposed in this paper, will call for a reallocation of resources. Less is likely to be spent on teaching in its traditional forms, while more will be required for the preparation of independent learning materials and systems. Although, in the long term, many of the new systems will increase efficiency, there will certainly be significant start up costs in the short term, as institutions which have developed resource based learning have found. In a growing number of institutions, work formerly carried out by academic staff is beginning to be carried out by support staff or by students, through peer tutoring, supplemental instruction or proctoring, while academic staff themselves take on new roles.

The economic benefits of these approaches may not be immediately evident, or easy to define, since such new approaches may be more effective at reducing hidden wastage than reducing overall expenditure. This is likely to be the case, for example, in relation to guidance and tutoring services, where increased staffing and new delivery strategies are likely to increase motivation and effective learning without necessarily generating evidence of improvement in qualifications or reduced withdrawal.

Many institutions have begun to explore these issues, and the work of the Open Learning Foundation and the Open University provides some indicators of possible strategies and costs, but in most institutions such changes remain on a relatively small scale. As new modes of delivery, guidance and assessment move from the margins to the mainstream it will become increasingly important to investigate the cost effectiveness of different approaches to resource use.

Human resources

The changing shape of higher education and the services which it delivers must affect the roles which its staff carry out, and how these are organised and managed. The traditional role of the academic, combining lecturing, tutoring, assessment, research and consultancy is already being fragmented and divided. Some are specialising in only some of these roles, while some of the roles are transferring: to advanced or postgraduate students in the case of some tutoring, proctoring and mentoring schemes, to support staff in the case of some guidance roles. The development of materials based and open learning approaches, and of new learning technologies, produces new roles for the managers of information, and for staff concerned with publishing and the production of visual material. The creation of new structures for curriculum and staff development also call for new kinds of skill.

Capital resources

Much of the system was starved of capital investment during the 1980s, exacerbated by the rapidly growing cost of books, of specialist equipment in science and technology, and the growth of new teaching and information technology. This was a special problem for the former polytechnics, and for them incorporation has made it possible to raise private sector funding for the first time. Many institutions are tied to buildings designed for older modes of teaching, and their ability to restructure the curriculum is limited by their ability to redesign buildings. A growing proportion of part-time local learners living at home (mainly, perhaps, mature students) may reduce the costs of providing accommodation, and new communication technologies may reduce the need for large teaching buildings. However, the costs of equipment are likely to continue to escalate, and in some fields more creative partnerships with employers may be the only way of addressing this.

6 An Agenda for Action

Achieving the vision will require action by many individuals and agencies, over a long period. The agenda identified here is therefore not framed as a set of recommendations, but as a set of aims and objectives for the new higher education. It will be for each of the interested parties to debate whether each one is necessary, and what part they might play in achieving it.

The Aim

The aim of development will be cultural change throughout higher education and the agencies which interact with it. This will seek to develop a culture where:

- learning is recognised as a universal lifelong activity
- empowerment of individuals is seen as a key to economic and social development
- accreditation seeks to include rather than exclude
- higher education is an active contributor to economic activity
- diversity is recognised as a strength
- the outcomes and achievements of higher education are made explicit

The Method

Since coherent development will require the support of all the players, the first step must be to stimulate an active and informed debate about the issues raised in this paper.

The Objectives

An adult higher education will need to achieve the follwing objectives:

Learner Support

define entitlement

A framework for defining entitlement, including entitlement at national and local level to access, equity, quality, support, range, credit and resourcing

provide guidance

Coherent structures of guidance and learning support within and outside institutions, including clear policies, management structures and quality assurance systems

provide tutoring

Systems which maintain the experience of direct engagement with a tutor, and the opportunity for face to face contact within realistic resource constraints

develop learning contracts

Strategies for negotiating "learning contracts" between learners or groups of learners, academics and employers

record achievement

A framework for recording achievement and action planning, nationally consistent, and consistent with similar systems in schools, further education and workplace appraisal

ensure equity

Strategies to ensure that those with particular needs arising from gender, disability, cultural background or ethnic origin are able to participate on an equal basis

Curriculum

define the core

A consensus about what "core curriculum" higher education should offer to all learners

define range

A consensus about the minimum range of higher education which should be available in any region

develop curriculum models

A range of curriculum models reflecting different kinds of purpose and structure, and different ways of relating learning, research, life, and work

diversify teaching and learning

Develop and deploy a wider and more diverse range of approaches to teaching and learning, to match particular needs and learners

use technology

A more widespread and creative use of information technology: to improve communication, disseminate knowledge and foster independent learning

support curriculum development

More coherent national support structures for curriculum development

Credit

increase understanding

A wider recognition, among the general public and those within higher education, of the diversity of progression routes, and the complexity of the interlock between learning and work, both paid and unpaid

provide a credit framework

A national credit framework embracing all post-initial learning, regardless of location or institution, capable of recognising relatively small units of achievement, and operating across academic, professional and vocational boundaries.

develop assessment

Approaches to assessment and accreditation, including the accreditation of prior learning, assessment on demand and group and self assessment, which balance the requirement for explicit and public criteria with quality and cost effectiveness.

integrate the academic and the vocational

Qualification and accreditation systems which enable learning from academic and vocational fields to be recognised within the same programme

explore multiple open entry

An examination of the feasibility of a system which allows entry at more points, on the basis of guided self assessment

Quality

extend accountability

Strategies for making higher education accountable to all the relevant partners (including learners, teachers, employers and the community) and involving all in the processes of quality assurance, assessment and audit.

make criteria public

Clear and public criteria for the assessment of quality in higher education, and mechanisms to debate and refine these.

encourage integration

Systems which integrate the elements of higher education (teaching/learning, research, dissemination, consultancy etc), rather than driving them apart.

monitor participation and outcomes

Systems which monitor participation, outcomes and longer term benefits (generally, and by age and specific groups).

use feedback

Mechanisms to collect and act on feedback from learners, including feedback through guidance systems

publish information

Comprehensible and comprehensive strategies for publishing information on the performance of the system, and of individual institutions within it.

ensure consistency

Approaches to quality which are consistent across the sectoral divisions within post-school education and training

develop staff

Strategies to ensure that academic and support staff, and their partners from companies and the wider community are prepared for, and supported in, changing roles and responsibilities, as teachers, learners and creators of knowledge, and to play a full part in the development and maintenance of quality.

Resources

stimulate informed debate

An extensive and informed debate about priorities and strategies for financing higher education, including the role of funding through learners, and of individual and employer contributions

define entitlements

A clear national agreement on entitlement to public support for post-school education, provided on an equitable basis to all able to benefit, regardless of mode of study location or timing

research models

Research on the impact of alternative approaches to funding, examining:

- the long term economic benefits of higher education, for individuals and society,
- models which encourage participation by those for whom learning is not their primary, full-time occupation,
- approaches which reward diversity and responsiveness by providers,
- cost effective approaches to assessment and accreditation, including open access assessment and the accreditation of prior learning

model human resource development

Models of effective human resource development within higher education institutions to ensure that the full potential of the institution as a learning organisation is developed

develop capital resources

Models for the management of buildings and technology to maximise learning, using a range of appropriate modes

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8 Policy Group Membership

Professor C Duke (Chair)	Pro Vice Chancellor, University of Warwick Vice-Chair, NIACE Executive Committee
Naseem Anwar	Faculty of Health, University of Central Lancashire
Dr Ron Barnett	Centre for Higher Education Studies, London University Institute of Education
Dr Hywel Francis	Director of Adult Continuing Education, University College of Swansea
Ruth Gee	Chief Executive, Association for Colleges
Susanne Haselgrove	Director of Continuing Education, University of Bristol
Philip Jones	Assistant Director, Division of CATS and Access Higher Education Quality Council
Professor Ian McNay	Centre for Higher Education Management, Anglia Polytechnic University
Katherine Leni Oglesby	Deputy Director of Continuing Education, University of Lancaster
Sue Pedder	Chief Officer, London Open College Federation
Professor David Robertson	Executive Director (Policy Development), Liverpool John Moores University
Ros Seyd	Further and Higher Education Branch, Department of Employment
Professor Maria Slowey	Director of Adult Continuing Education, University of Glasgow
Peter Syme	London Regional Director, Open University
Freda Tallantyre	Head of Polylink, University of Northumbria
Stephen McNair	Associate Director (Higher Education), NIACE

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An Adult Higher Education

A Vision

A Policy
Discussion Paper

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (England and Wales) is the national organisation for adult learning. It plays a central role in advising on developments in policy and practice in all forms of adult learning, working with national and local government, educational institutions, TECs, employers and others to promote equal opportunities of access to learning for all adults.

NIACE
21 De Montfort Street
Leicester, LE1 7GE

Tel: 0533 551451
Fax: 0533 854514

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